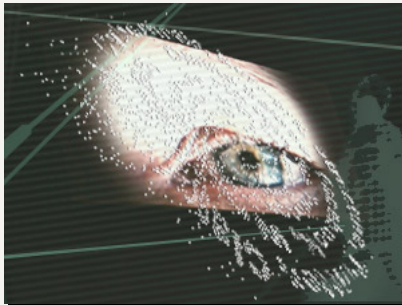
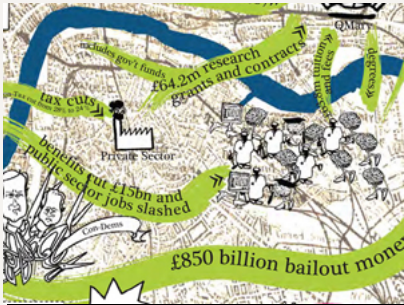


Lateral

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Mashup by Erin R. Anderson



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Welcome to *Lateral's* inaugural issue. *Lateral* is the publishing platform for the Cultural Studies Association (CSA). Our aims are to support, leverage, and organize the capacities of those affiliated with CSA to develop critical forms of publishing that are commensurate with innovative approaches to knowledge making, political intervention, and material forms of cultural expression. *Lateral* focuses on providing a place of experimentation in the range of material forms so that the knowing, feeling, sensibility we ascribe to the cultural can find an elastic and sustainable outlet for expression. In short, *Lateral* is interested in recasting both the form and content of what cultural studies can be.

The means for gathering, evaluating, and publishing work is called a *research thread*. Threads are edited and curated by individuals who solicit, commission, and guide the peer-review process and the evaluation of submissions. *Lateral* is not subject to the time and space parameters that attend to most sponsored or proprietary journal endeavors. Work can take months to reach a point where it is ready for publication or it can be published quickly in response to readiness or timeliness. Our publishing process affords both internal spaces where work can be developed and public domains that are freely accessible. The platform can also support a wide range of publishing forms and processes.

In this inaugural issue, *Lateral* takes the form of a cluster of four research threads. The initial threads converge around a consideration of knowledge formations, institutional and material location, and political intervention and implication. Rather than being organized topically or thematically, the threads provide various problematics, temperaments, tones, or dispositions toward developing work. The threads are in effect portals in which interests in identity, pedagogy, theory, violence, embodiment or other concerns that flow through cultural studies can be joined and engaged. New threads may be proposed to the curatorial board at any time.

The initial four threads are meant as an exploration of what is possible and an invitation for further work. *Theory and Method*, curated by Patricia Clough, treats various forms of knowing and being in cultural studies research. *Creative Industries*, curated by Jaafar Aksikas, invites composite methodological approaches to intersectoral flows inside and outside the university. *Universities in Question*, curated by Bruce Burgett and Randy Martin, decenters established claims for disciplinary, labor, and political economic legitimations for higher education. *Mobilisations, Interventions, and Cultural Policy* curated by Emma Dowling, pursues current transformational activisms to rethink values of polity, policy, and participation.

We welcome your responses to what you find here and proposals for future threads. In either case, contact the members of *Lateral's* curatorial board:

Bruce Burgett

Patricia Clough

Randy Martin

INTRODUCTION: THEORY AND METHOD

Patricia Ticineto Clough - Queens College and the Graduate Center CUNY

The Theory and Method Thread of *Lateral* launches its first publication with two essays, one by John Mowitt of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at University of Minnesota and one by Jared Sexton, Director of African American Studies, School of Humanities at University of California Irvine. Together their essays along with responses by Christina Sharpe of American Studies at Tufts University, Adam Sitze of Black Studies and Law, Jurisprudence and Social Thought at Amherst College and Morgan Adamson of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature at University of Minnesota, all take theory to one of the most pressing, worldly and yet intimate, of issues faced by each of us, whether working in and/or outside the academy: that is, the conditions of study, or studies, in the University.

Mowitt's essay, "The Humanities and the University in Ruin" puts the issue before us in terms of work or, as Mowitt puts it, 're: working' the work of study, scholarship and research under the contemporary conditions of 'biopolitical control' or neoliberal structural adjustment of the academy. These conditions now well known have put us beyond the troubles of discipline or disciplinarity to something more abstract and technical, if not technological, a matter which Adam Sitze addresses, emphasizing Mowitt's critical account of the technological transformation of the academy which nonetheless refuses melancholia; thus Mowitt takes another path through the ruin. Mowitt's other path, a daring proposal to re: work work, revisits Freud's pleasure principle but more importantly Marx's labor theory of value and its more recent elaborations within the Italian workerist tradition. Mowitt warns against reducing the issue of study to complaints of poor pay and poor working conditions and therefore holds the issue of the labor of study on a fine line between the refusal of the work of study altogether and the insistence on simply enjoying the study that we are required to do or paid to do. Working conditions and remuneration for work, not to mention layoffs, hiring freezes and slashing of benefits, certainly are pressing concerns as Morgan Adamson sharply reminds us in his response to Mowitt. Offering a quick survey of some of the horrid details of the work expected of research assistants in science labs, Adamson also softens the distinction implied in Mowitt's focus on the humanities as against the sciences. But Mowitt is not denying the poor conditions under which so many of us work for insufficient pay in and outside the University; he rather is warning us about moving too quickly off the fine line between refusal and enjoyment of the required or paid work of study. He is arguing instead for the value of study as a labor of the negative. Mowitt then takes some elegant last moves to turn this return to the labor of the negative into the work of affirmation, thought affirming itself; he thereby moves beyond the dialectic and the Euro-centric Hegelian tradition of progress to affirm instead the immanent unfolding of mindfulness or thoughtfulness, an unfolding of an affective labor that bears within it the in-excess of measure, the yet-incalculable excess of the current calculability of value. This makes the re: working of study not merely a matter of the human or the humanities but of the technical/human medium we fast are becoming, and which we are coming to know we always have been, as has the University.

If it would seem fortuitous to have Jared Sexton's essay along side Mowitt's, it also is a necessity, given that the tension between horrible conditions of study and the desire for the in-excess of the calculable value of study or living mindfully or thoughtfully, can hardly be

addressed without addressing the fates of those institutes of study, the studies, that bear the names of those who have been and are marginalized in the University: Women, Blacks, Ethnics, Queers, for exemplary examples. To ask what of these in the neoliberal, structurally adjusted academy is, as Sexton sees it, to ask again about the tension between what has been coined afro-pessimism and black-optimism or what black intellectuals long have discussed as life after or in the social death of slavery. Taking up the arguments of a number of these intellectuals, especially those most recently offered by Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, Sexton joins Mowitt in proposing that we stay on the fine line, here between optimism and pessimism, between life and death, which if seen to be merely a matter of an opposition can too easily be resolved without allowing for the labor of the negative or the time of the immanent unfolding of mindfulness or thoughtfulness in a yet-incalculable excess of the current calculability of value. Over time, or in the rhythm of a return, we are turned again and again to the intimacy of life and death, hopefully without an over-identification with the latter. For the optimists, the refusal of this identification is an insistence on "black agency being logically and ontologically prior" to a social order that is anti-black, prior to a governance that turns blackness criminal and therefore calls for an affirmative politics of fugitivity. On the side of pessimism, is the longue duree of social death in the ongoing history of slavery and anti-black racism, if not racism generally. It is blackness theorized as "a structural position," "a conceptual framework" and "a structure of feeling." On the fine line between this pessimism and this optimism, Sexton argues that a question arises as to how to approach this social life in social death while enabling new means of thoughtfulness or mindfulness in living, in studying, in the University and elsewhere. In resonance with Mowitt, Sexton borrowing from David Marriott argues for "the need to affirm affirmation through negation...not as a moral imperative...but as a psychopolitical necessity." Here negation becomes affirmation, as Sexton argues further that rather than theorizing an either/or, why not a both/and. And if in her response to Sexton, Christina Sharpe would agree, she also would return us to the psychopolitical necessity of such theorizing by pointing to her students who have organized again and again for black studies, and who in doing so each time also ask whether black studies "can ameliorate the quotidian experience of terror in black lives lived in an anti-black world?" And if not, what should the relationship be between life and black studies, or between life and the University.

To theorize in and about the University at this time, it would seem that it is best not to get too far from this question. Theory is better put to the task of seeking the time of unfolding between the fact of blackness and living black social life, the unfolding of mindfulness, thoughtfulness in the bodies of subjects as an emergent agency that modulates structures of feeling, conceptual frameworks and structural positionalities enough for these to give new resources for our optimism.

The essays and the responses that follow are passionate and rich in intellectual explorations of one of the most important issues before us.

THE HUMANITIES AND THE UNIVERSITY IN RUIN

John Mowitt - Cultural Studies & Comparative Literature - University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

I.

My title makes a direct, if singular, reference to Bill Readings' 1996 study *The University in Ruins*, a text whose 15-year anniversary is now upon us. The reasons for this are several, but before delineating them permit me to state in very general terms what the following remarks are concerned to do. Seen from the heights of Table Mountain, without the cloth, my concerns engage the status of the humanities as part of the history of post-secondary education now that its traditional, largely Eurocentric legitimation—think here of Matthew Arnold's appeal to the categories of "sweetness and light" in *Culture and Anarchy*—has given way to a contemporary neo-liberal legitimation wherein the humanities is valued for producing "flexible" and "multiply skilled" worker/citizens for the new global economy. Although Arnold's view could never effectively hide its compensatory character, that is, its valuation of cultural expression as the means by which to console those torn by social conflicts falsely deemed unsurpassable, the neo-liberal paradigm has demanded that—in a distinctly therapeutic discourse—we simply "get over" our despair about such conflicts and cynically craft, using the available technologies, cultural micro-climates for private use. Taste and literacy converge in becoming utterly personal.

The view advanced and defended here is that this situation—the choice itself—is intolerable, perhaps even unlivable. What is called for, however, is not yet another defense of the humanities, but something more fundamental and for that reason more difficult.

To clarify what I am attempting to get at in saying this I want to take up briefly a very important recent statement on the matter of the humanities. I am thinking of Mahmood Mamdani's "The Importance of Research in a University," a text that takes a bold, if conflicted, stand on the centrality of the humanities to the university in Africa. Aware that Mamdani's status in such debates is in certain respects complicated by the recent controversy surrounding the proposed closure of the Center for African Studies at UCT—a debate about which I know embarrassingly little—I will zero in only on those moments in this particular statement that help me clarify the purpose of my intervention.

Mamdani advocates that, "we have no choice but to train postgraduate students in the very institutions in which they will have to work," a view given autobiographical weight and one designed to address the longstanding problem of the "brain drain" to the North and West. Although by the end of his statement Mamdani importantly problematizes the intellectual character of the local/global distinction presumed at the outset, he takes productive aim at the problem of what he terms, "consultancy," that is, the propensity within Africa—and the continentalism is his, not mine—to reduce research to the largely empirical project of either confirming or challenging research paradigms produced elsewhere. Against the consultant who is a master of nothing, Mamdani calls for the indigenous production and reproduction of experts, experts who would be involved in original research.

In fleshing out what original research might encompass, Mamdani offers the following important evaluation of humanistic inquiry. "In a university, there needs to be room for both applied research, meaning policy oriented research, and basic research. The distinction is this: unlike

applied research which is preoccupied with making recommendations, the point of basic research is to identify and question assumptions that drive the very process of knowledge production." Describing the Makerere Institute of Social Research he characterizes the dual engagement of a proper research program by saying, "on the one hand [it involves] a critical engagement with the society at large, and on the other a critical grasp of disciplinary literature, world wide, so as to identify key debates within the literature and locate specific queries within those debates." In characterizing these formulations as "important" I mean especially to underscore Mamdani's insistent appeal to "critical engagement" as a way to think about what is distinctive to research that is humanistic. However, in placing the accent here, I can also indicate what separates my own remarks from Mamdani. Put concisely, what strikes me as underdeveloped in his discussion, is not the distinction between quantitative versus critical research, but an account of the *work* of "research" that grasps what constitutes its distinctly humanistic value. This is presupposed in Mamdani's nimble glide from "basic research" to the humanities, but it is left unelaborated.

To be clear: **what I am concerned to do here** is to consider how a "value" for the humanities that appeals neither to Arnoldian Eurocentrism, nor contemporary neo-liberalism, can be teased out of an account of the character of the *labor* involved in what Mamdani is calling "research."

II.

The "class of '68." This somewhat impish designation for what is also known as French Theory, is, when not simply an object of ridicule, fast becoming a mere term of endearment. Before this process arrives at the zero degree of affect, it seems useful—perhaps now more than ever—to recall that beyond simply grouping a generation of academic intellectuals together, this formulation also foregrounds an important fact. It reminds us that French Theory belonged to the structural crisis of the French university. By this I do not mean that French Theory was either the cause or the effect of this crisis. But rather, that it was interwoven with this crisis and as such invites us to recognize that many of its signature preoccupations not only bear directly on the nature of the university, but they also, for that very reason, retain a certain immediate pertinence for those working to sort the current fate of the university as a socio-epistemological institution. At the risk of stirring an old post, recall that Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* was a study, commissioned by the *Conseil des Universités* in Quebec, written to, among other things, reorient and rethink the research activities of the Western university. Or, to take another example, that much of Jacques Derrida's voluminous writings on the university, including his unsettling reading of Kant's "The Conflict of the Faculties" emerged from his activities within GREPH, the group for research into the teaching of philosophy that formed in response to a ministerial recommendation that philosophy instruction be removed from high schools. Of course, the international student movement of the 1960s resonated profoundly in various national theoretical and political contexts but in the French case, **the snarl between theory and the university** seems hidden in plain view.

Perhaps the most sustained articulation of this snarl remains Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*. Because this text has been so thoroughly combed (at least in the US context), I want to approach it by, as it were, brushing it against the grain. Consider in this spirit the final three sentences of Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel*:

In the ruins of great buildings the idea of the plan speaks more impressively than in lesser buildings, however well preserved they are; and for this reason the German *Trauerspiel* merits interpretation. In the spirit of allegory it is conceived from the outset as a ruin, a fragment. Others may shine resplendently as on the first day; this form preserves the image of beauty to the very last. (*Origin* 235)

These lines, like most, say more than they mean, and certainly more than can be addressed in a short lecture, so I will simply observe that Readings' study has prompted us to hear in their melancholic strains something urgent about the contemporary fate of the university, and this regardless of whether the buildings on your campus qualify as great.

To amplify these strains I digress. My early writing placed strong emphasis on the connection forged by Michel Foucault between "disciplinary power," and *the* disciplines, that is, those institutionally organized practices that we simultaneously elevate and debase by referring to them as "academic." At the time, this derivative innovation in the sociology of knowledge seemed important largely because of the way it helped bring the anti-disciplinarity of textuality to light. Missing from this discussion, however, was the attention brought to Foucault's concept of disciplinary power first by Gilles Deleuze and later by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. This attention spawned a structural, even historical distinction between discipline and *control*, a distinction that, in the hands of Hardt and Negri was put to work to, among other things, cast light on Marx's distinction between the formal and real subsumption of labor under capital. There is, of course, much to discuss here but for my purposes what Deleuze's emphasis prompts is careful consideration of what happens to *the* disciplines with the advent of the society of control, with *the advent of the real subsumption of labor under capital*, or expressed in the language of contemporary public policy, neo-liberalism.

Marx himself provided important if unwitting insight on the matter when in elaborating the related, and under-valued, distinction between productive and unproductive labor he wrote:

A schoolmaster who instructs others is not a productive worker. But a schoolmaster who works for wages in an institution along with others, using his own labor to increase the money of the entrepreneur who owns the knowledge-mongering institution, is a productive worker. But for the most part, work of this sort has scarcely reached the stage of being subsumed even formally under capital and belongs essentially to a transitional stage.
(*Capital* 1044)

As a reiteration of a parallel he earlier draws between professors and masters within the context of guild production (1029), the later formulation invites one to consider both whether with the advent of the global society of control, school teaching *in fact* remains lost in transition somewhere between the pre-formal, the formal and the real subsumption of labor, but also to what extent and with what significance does education factor, and factor decisively in Marx's thinking about the becoming real, of formal subsumption. Now, from where I sit the so-called transition is over. *The university is a "knowledge-mongering institution"* and school teaching is largely productive labor, which is precisely why syndicalism has asserted itself with urgency, if not success, in so many corners of the educational field, but also, more ominously why the drumbeat of "deliverables" or "outcomes," has become tortuously loud.

At the risk of squandering whatever good will these remarks may have generated, I turn now to a speech given over 75 years ago, namely, Martin Heidegger's Rectoral Address, "On the Self-Assertion of the German University." This much raked over address draws out a hypnotically suggestive connection between the university and *the* disciplines. Arguing that to be worthy of "self-assertion" the university must engage in a vigorous form of self-examination, Heidegger goes on to specify that self-examination ought properly assume the form of a questioning that, "shatters the division of the sciences into rigidly separated specialties," and, "carries them back from their endless and aimless dispersal into isolated fields and corners" ("Self-Assertion" 474). That he is thus binding self-assertion/examination and what we would call interdisciplinarity is perfectly clear. So too, alas, are the political grounds of his questioning. But we need not endorse his studied ignorance of German politics in the 1930s to realize that precisely what neo-liberalism has achieved within all precincts of public education, K through 16 and beyond, is the ruin of the conditions of possibility for what Heidegger calls "self-assertion." It has done so, and this is crucial, not by defeating or

overcoming "self-assertion," but by metabolizing and thus neutralizing both it and the interdisciplinary re-structuring of knowledge it heralded. How? By folding the relation of the university to its outside (say, the church or the state) inward. Self assertion succumbs to the compromising vagaries of so called shared or faculty governance. In this sense, however controversial "self-assertion" may have sounded at the time, it has revealed itself to be little more than a *re-assertion* of Immanuel Kant's ill-conceived Faustian pact with Frederick II, the pact whereby access to enlightenment was secured by exchanging private service for public freedom.

One might well argue, indeed I am prepared to argue, that *this* is the deep form of the public that the neo-liberal call for economic privatization is designed to re-structure. Surely this, at least in the US context, is what is at stake in the systematic weakening of tenure, in the uncontrolled proliferation of adjuncts, professional administrative appointments and part-timers, in the legislative obsession with graduation rates and progress toward degrees, in the near hysterical resistance to syndicalism (especially in the public sector), in the unrelenting administrative rhetoric of "excellence" and "best practices," and, perhaps most cynically of all in what David Horowitz refers to as the Academic Bill of Rights, that is, the farcical repetition of the tragedy of the 1960s when students in the US and elsewhere sought empowerment by making common cause with other social movements antagonized by the structural adjustments of Empire, not, as is now the case, by litigating over grades or a chimerical absence of balance on course syllabi.

Put simply, academic intellectuals are encamped in the "self-assertive" university that now stands in the ruins for which it had been destined. Inside, strewn in some forensically legible blast pattern are to be found the "interdisciplinarity," "internationalism" and "diversity" that are fast becoming buzzing beacons of banality. To catch hold of the new beauty that flares up at this moment of danger, to redeem the idea of the plan silhouetted by the ruins of this university, it will take different concepts in the hands of differently organized "re: workers."

III.

So how precisely should we conceive these re: workers? This term I derive from "re: working" which I spell, "re, colon, space, working." In the book I have just completed, *Radio: Essays in Bad Reception*, I propose to use re: working as a novel way to translate Bertolt Brecht's concept of *umfunktionierung*. More typically, this term is translated either as re-functioning or repurposing, perhaps even reconstructing, all perfectly reasonable choices except for the fact that they fail to capture an important theoretical, even political resonance of the term. Specifically, they drop the reflexivity that mattered to Brecht, a reflexivity that allowed him to suggest that "re: working" radio, had to be as much about radio as about *work* itself. In effect, radio implicates the labor of our reflection about it in the effort to recast its purpose.

Thus, re: workers. Workers as objects of reflection, but at the same time, workers as subjects caught up in the labor of reflection, of repeating themselves differently. To save time, let me simply assert that an important step has been taken down the path I wish to extend by university theorists in the US like Marc Bousquet and Jeffrey Williams (to pick out two prominent figures), scholars who have insisted that we hear fully the word "worker" in the phrase, "student worker." With compassionate rigor they have, in effect, re: worked the concept of the student by establishing how fully higher education now takes place in the context of a thoroughly neo-liberalized industry that services a clientele of future employees who are plunging ever deeper into debt to secure degrees of ever shrinking economic value. Among the many virtues of this work is that it has helped to politicize, in albeit narrowly economic terms, **the social being named "student worker,"** yet as crucial as such gains are they risk everything when we too glibly assume that they authorize rewording placards that read, "I Support University Workers," to

read, "I am a University Worker," where crucial differences are allowed to go unspoken by the convenient urgencies of solidarity.

So allow me to repeat a criticism Bosquet et al. have already heard, namely, by treating the phrase "student workers" as a pleonasm doesn't one effectively risk factoring the student out of the equation? While it is certainly true that far more attention has been paid to the student as a bearer of cultural literacy or a builder of the nation, this is no justification for abandoning an opportunity to re: work what "student" might mean now that we have taken the step of thinking with agonizing, not to say dispiriting clarity its relation to the social division of labor. Yes, students work, they are part of the system of wage and salaried labor, but how precisely are we to think this fact in the event of the specific *labor of studying*? This seems to me to be the precise theoretical challenge before us and not only because it represents a move as yet untaken in an argument that concerns us all.

So what would it mean to think students as re: workers, to grasp those who study—and I put it this way to implicate the entire field of "intellectual labor"—what would it mean to re: work the work of study? Two approaches suggest themselves and time will oblige me merely to sketch them. The first looms up in those heated conversations prompted by sympathy strikes where students, typically undergraduate students, accuse their teachers (often themselves graduate students) with exploiting them, with taking something from them that is not rightfully theirs to take. This is a discussion, perhaps more prevalent in the US than elsewhere, whose political valences would be easier to crystallize if we spent some time attempting to detail what Marx meant when, as we have seen, he indexed the transition from the formal to the real subsumption of value to the industrialization of education. Yes, let's be clearer about what real subsumption means, but even more important is grasping and documenting the event of real subsumption as it participates in the extraction of surplus value from educational labor, including the labor of studying. The Weberian "economy of prestige" has perhaps been given a new and decisive relevance by neo-liberalism's fatal attention to performance indicators such as the grade point averages and degree completion rates of student cohorts. The expropriation, or second enclosure of such indices, is routinely used on the academic market to establish comparative advantages over institutional competitors. In effect, surplus value *is* being extracted from so-called unproductive (intellectual) labor and this produces a link between students and workers that has only the most oblique relation to their jobs.

The second approach involves steering between two tempting, but I think, failed options. Both involve re: working work *as such*. On the one hand, there is the Italian workerist position. This has roots that extend back to Paul Lafargue and his "right to laziness," but which in the hands of Mario Tronti and more recently Negri, pressures the concept and practice of work within the capitalist division of labor by, when all is said and done, simply refusing to perform it, by, in effect, conflating work with the effort to boycott it. Although the mediating steps would be time-consuming to trace, one might subsume *this* re: working of work under the heading of George Bataille's "economy of expenditure." All its many attractions notwithstanding, and to be sure "the refusal to study" has become something of a competitive sport in the US, it should be clear that sooner or later this approach—if grasped in and as the event of studying—cedes the university to the asses of vocationalization that can already be heard braying at its gates. When study simply reverts to training, something important to students is irrevocably squandered. And not in a good way.

On the other hand, there is the option roundly criticized by Jacques Donzelot, and Robert Castel among others. It is likewise a re: working of work. Not by refusing it, but by enjoying it. Although it would take too long to elaborate in detail, Donzelot, in a series of papers from the late 70s, showed with compelling force precisely how the "pleasure in work" movement developed in France to manage, both ideologically and technically, the subsumption of "the social" by economic processes shared an alarming affinity with the "joy in work" rhetoric of the concentration camps of WWII. The immediate target of his criticisms was proposals circulating in

Paris for protecting workers from the erosion of their statutory relation to their jobs, proposals that insisted monotonously on the virtues of "permanent retraining" and preventive medicine (largely managing stress and controlling depression). But in generating the genealogy of such proposals Donzelot set in motion concepts that urge us to locate the work of studying within it. Especially important is not just the matter of retraining—are students, especially those in the humanities, not routinely told that employers are keenly interested in their ability to learn and relearn?—but in addition, the rather crucial matter of grasping the place of pleasure in intellectual work. However, in his eagerness to alert us to the risks of succumbing to a fully calculated and therefore suspicious "enjoying what one does for a living," Donzelot settles for an estrangement that only partially illuminates the re: working of study where, in fact, something like intellectual enjoyment *does* abide. That said, what Donzelot does help us think is the place of something other than the satisfaction of need in the event of work, a thought Marx himself, in basing use value on need, struggled to grasp.

Thus, if theoretical attention to the marketing of student performance constitutes a first approach to re: working study, then the second approach might well be directed at the socially conditioned space *between* boycotting and enjoying work. In other words, if we want to be clearer about what re: working the work of the student might mean, then we need to articulate in political terms the difference between refusing and enjoying work as it arises in the event of studying. Put differently, we need to grasp the value of what humanists do when they do it.

IV.

When in 1971, Foucault was lured away from Philosophy at Vincennes he urged those attending his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France to remember that a "real escape from Hegel presupposes [. . .] a knowledge of what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to think against Hegel." (Foucault 74) I invoke this memory not primarily to draw final attention to another decisive encounter between the "class of '68" and the Parisian university system, but to urge that Hegel's concept, found already in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Mind*, of the "labor of the negative" may help us tease out a practice suspended between refusal and pleasure, a practice that re: works the work of study, and in doing so gives us a way to value the work of the humanities beyond the impasses of Eurocentrism and neo-liberalism.

In the *Phenomenology* the "labor of the negative" (81) appears when, clearly sparring with Spinoza, Hegel establishes the difference between substance and subject, by asserting that divine intelligence without the "labor of the negative" devolves into edification. Theology, not science. What science, and his word is *Wissenschaft*, requires is a struggle between knowing and being, a struggle based in negation where the life of the mind advances by assimilating the object and negating the identity between the subject and the object produced through that assimilation. If, as he will go immediately on to say the "truth is the whole" this is because the whole emerges in and through this struggle. These days, of course, we find terms like science, truth, whole, quaint, perhaps even suspicious. But, if we hear faintly rumbling behind them the "labor of the negative" that, for Hegel, is a defining characteristic of the life of mind, then perhaps we have secured new purchase on the *work* of study. Between refusal and pleasure lies negation.

In a sense, Plato had defended the philosophical vocation in similar terms. In *The Republic* he proposes that the value of the life of the mind derives precisely from its *uselessness*, a term taken up centuries later by the founders of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton to designate the power and importance of "pure research." However, what Hegel's formulation gains is an important and explicit reference to "work," to "labor." So much so, in fact, that "the labor of the negative," can be understood to enter into a fecund relation with what Marx called "unproductive" labor, that is, labor thought to expend rather than produce surplus value. For Marx, unproductive labor reached beyond mere consumption (the using up of things of value) to

embody a logic that negated that of productive labor, a fact that helps explain the political danger of its real subsumption within capital.

In *The University in Ruins* this general line of reasoning is taken up under the rather different heading of what Readings calls "dissensus," that is, the non-objective or goal of academic inquiry freed from the quantitative pressures of producing consensus. While this maneuver feels a bit too tidy for me (not to mention that my colleagues have *long* been masters of dissensus), I appreciate Readings' insistence on the debate over the concept of community from which his insight is derived. Because this debate sought to counter the assumptions of Hegelian and later Marxian sociology (the family or class as defining instances of the social), it also prompts one to hesitate before the concept of negation at work within the "labor of the negative." What prompts this hesitation? In a word, death. A final citation from Hegel's *Phenomenology* will justify the melodrama of this assertion.

[T]he life of the mind is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being. It only wins to its truth when it finds itself utterly torn asunder. It is this mighty power, not by being a positive which turns away from the negative, as when we say of anything it is nothing or it is false, and, being done with it, pass off to something else: on the contrary, mind is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it. (93)

Hegel goes on to clarify that this account of the negative belongs to the very core of his theory of the subject, establishing beyond a doubt that he is not here formulating a therapeutic "acknowledgement of death," but instead producing an ontological structure of death that locates it at the very tip of the spear where consciousness and matter meet in being torn apart. Taken then as part of what is understood as "the labor of the negative," we not only are compelled to grasp it as a synonym for "the life of the mind," but we are likewise compelled to equate negation and death and conceive "the labor of the negative" as something like the work of death. Although his immediate concerns are different, Achille Mbembe raised related issues when he said in an interview with the French journal of Catholic opinion, *Esprit*:

The totem which colonized peoples discovered behind the mask of humanism and universalism was not only deaf and blind most of the time, it was also, above all, characterized by the desire for its own death, but insofar as this death was necessarily conveyed through that of others, its was a delegated death. ("What" 2/13).

While this necropolitical reading of humanism reminds us to recognize Hegel as a European, it also lets slip, perhaps through its "ablist" assumptions, the provocative ontology of thought Hegel is attempting to establish. That said, and setting aside Freud's rewording of the death drive as the pleasure principle, it strikes me that however appealing Hegel's "labor of the negative" might be as a way to re: work the work of study, the work of the humanities, it invites a necessary embrace of human finitude that risks de-secularizing the humanities in a rather unhelpful way. Thus, it might therefore make more sense, and with this I will conclude, to engage another figure whose works routinely appeared on the syllabi of the "Class of '68," namely Friedrich Nietzsche. Specifically, what everyone from Bataille to Deleuze responded to in Nietzsche was his insistence upon the power of affirmation, not by any means a saying yes to anything and everything, but an embrace of the continuity between consciousness and matter that the dialectic (whether Hegelian or Marxist) promised to restore only by first negating. There is, of course, an enormous amount to say here, but so as not leave you both exhausted and perplexed, let me propose that we re: work the work of study, of research (to invoke Mamdani) as a "labor of affirmation." That is, as a practice arising wherever and whenever the human is at stake, a practice that grounds the critique of quantification and consultancy in a mode of activity that exceeds them. The point is not simply to assign a new value to the humanities, to shift its ranking in the great chain of being, but to re-open the dossier on value and to affirm the urgency of wresting value away from both its cultural and economic degradation within

societies of control. In the process we will not only be saying yes to the labor of study, but to the space and project of the university whether in Africa or elsewhere. If we can formulate what the humanities does, perhaps we will also know where it must take place. In this respect Benjamin got it backwards: it is not the plan of great buildings that shine forth in their ruins, but the building of great plans that give ruin what value it has whether on the first day or the last.

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RESPONSE TO JOHN MOWITT'S "HUMANITIES AND THE UNIVERSITY IN RUIN"

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In "The Humanities and the University in Ruin," John Mowitt, calls for a radical rearticulation of the value of the humanities in the tradition of Bill Reading's *University in Ruin*. On the fifteenth anniversary of the publication of Reading's landmark work, Mowitt suggests that from the rubble of the modern university has arisen, "a contemporary neo-liberal legitimization wherein the humanities is valued for producing 'flexible' and 'multiply skilled' worker/citizens for the new global economy." For Mowitt, the dogma of neo-liberalism has emerged as the primary legitimating discourse for the humanities, as the university has lost its function as the proprietor of national culture with the decline of the nation state. Given the crisis of legitimization that the liberal arts have undergone, and the context of the control societies within which they persist, Mowitt takes on the daunting task of reasserting the value of the humanities outside of both state and neo-liberal discourses. In doing so, he argues against recent trends in critical university studies that highlight the question of intellectual labor. Particularly, he critiques the formulation of the student-worker a-la Marc Bousquet and others for emphasizing the question of work at the expense of the activity of study, arguing that this emphasis runs the risk of generating a politics of refusal that forecloses our ability to affirm the humanities in our present. To underscore the question of intellectual labor as labor in the tradition of Italian workerism, for Mowitt, ignores the intrinsic value of study, the distinct and defining character of what it is that the humanities do that cannot be fully accounted for by the category of work. In this way, Mowitt's argument echoes Readings, who writes at the end of *The University in Ruins* that we must "dwell in the ruins without belief, but with a commitment to Thought" (175). For Readings, this thought is non-productive, wasteful, and outside of that which can be calculated on the university's balance sheets. Mowitt reasserts a commitment to thought, a thought that is not intrinsically tied to questions of labor or utility, but is affirmative of itself. In a university where thought within the humanities has been reanimated and put to the ends of neo-liberalism, we must, according to Mowitt, "re-open the dossier on value and to affirm the urgency of wresting value away from both its cultural and economic degradation within societies of control." This affirmation forms the basis for a politics that works against the insidious trends of the neo-liberal university that would have us do away with Thought altogether.

And as we dwell in the ruins of the university with its shiny and new neo-liberal ornamentation, is it not precisely thought that seems to be under attack at every turn? At my and Mowitt's home institution, the University of Minnesota, the central administration has branded the university "Driven to Discover," as it forwards a radical agenda to restructure the College of Liberal arts with department closures and mergers that seem to have little to do with any coherent intellectual project, but instead enforce an administered interdisciplinarity. In the new college of liberal arts, the humanities is relegated to the most servile of positions in order to cut administrative and instructional costs even further and to make the practitioners of thought into ever more flexible workers. The financial crisis, it seems, has afforded my institution, like many others, the opportunity to enact a series of structural adjustments, the blueprints for which seem to have been lying in the bureau drawer of an administrator waiting for a crisis like the one we are currently living through to take form. As the hallowed halls of liberal arts lie in ruin, shrines to anti-thought are erected everywhere including a new wing of

the business school, institutes of biotechnology and the like, etc. Indeed, there seems to be a direct correlation between these two phenomena. As Chris Newfield has shown in *The Unmaking of the Public University*, over the past several decades, research institutions have developed accounting mechanisms to systematically siphon off tuition money from the liberal arts in order to fund their techno-scientific enterprises.

Mowitt and others seem to suggest that the crisis of the university we are presently living through might be thought of as the final battle being played out between the forces within the university set forth in Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*. In Kant's formative articulation, this battle is played out between the lower faculty, the philosophers and guardians of pure reason, and the practitioners of practical reason, whose research is always subject to an external, utilitarian end. Now, left with nothing but a set of neo-liberal clichés, the lower faculty have lost the legitimation that Humboldt assigned to them, nothing less than the "spiritual and moral training of the nation," and "science for its own sake," as Humboldt called it, is inevitably on the decline. This crisis of legitimation, well charted in Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, is the crisis that lies at the heart of both Readings and Mowitt's analysis of the postmodern and neo-liberal universities, respectively. So, then, we must be clear, when speaking of the crisis of the contemporary university, is this crisis of legitimation the crisis to which we are referring? Is not the aforementioned conflict between two forms of knowledge at the center of contemporary struggles over the university? Historically, taking up the defense of thought against the encroachment of the utilitarian and techno-scientific regime of knowledge has been a powerful mode of positioning leftist political struggles within the university and beyond. From Adorno and Horkheimer's critiques of instrumental reason to the March 22nd manifesto in Paris against the technocratic university, widely circulated during the iconic events of May 1968, a rejection of trends towards the domination of practical reason in the modern university has formed the basis leftist political movements in the struggle over higher education. An important contribution of Mowitt's argument is that it recasts the conflict of the faculties in light of what he rightly identifies as **a new regime of power within societies of control**.

While acknowledging the significance of these struggles, I must pose the following question: is the conflict among faculties set forward by Kant the most adequate way of understanding our contemporary situation? Put differently: what is effaced when we conceive of the "crisis of the university" and the "crisis of the humanities" as one and the same thing? I pose this question here because it is a question that I have been compelled to pose to myself over the past year. After completing my degree in Comparative Literature in January, I took a job as a staff organizer for the United Auto Workers who are currently engaged in a campaign to unionize the graduate assistants at the University of Minnesota. This job took me into the bowels of the buildings that house the enormous scientific, medical, and engineering research complexes that I previously regarded with the utmost disdain. What I found in these spaces, however, was not at all what I was expecting. In organizing the research assistants in the science and engineering departments, I encountered not the self-assured scientists bathing in corporate grant money; instead, I talked to countless students, the majority of them international, working endless hours in the lab carrying out the research of major corporations while earning less than a living wage. I heard horror story after horror story of poor and even dangerous working conditions, horrendous hours, PIs who forbade their graduate assistants from taking vacation, and violations of intellectual property rights that highlighted the intensely precarious nature of the labor of those who carry out the bulk of the actual research that goes on in the applied sciences. Many of these workers in the cognitariat that makes up a large portion of the neo-liberal university are our allies and critical thinkers of higher education in their own right. The most surprising thing to me about these encounters, however, was that in my years of writing and organizing around university politics and labor, I had failed to fully consider working conditions within the sciences. Being a product of the under-funded humanities and what I saw as

the university's systematic assault on thought, these questions remained, for me, unthought. In addition to these revelations, I found that those in science and engineering programs often shared the same suspicion and outright hatred of the liberal arts as we had for them. I began to wonder whether or not the perpetuation of this conflict, this division, this battle among the faculties served the interests of the central administration more than the parties involved, furthering a discourse of scarcity that understands survival within the contemporary university as a zero sum game. As these encounters brought me to the limits of my thought, they also expose the limits, or perhaps the unthought, of a particular form of university politics. Is there is a possibility to bring together a politics that asserts the value of the humanities with labor struggles in the university in a way that does not reinscribe divisions and hierarchies within forms of knowledge? The difficulty of such a political project is registered in Mowitt's analysis of [the crisis of letitimation within the humanities](#), and presents itself as somewhat of an aporia.

What is clear is that we cannot imagine a form of knowledge that is outside of the material conditions of its production, a point with which Mowitt would agree. As I have argued elsewhere, the contemporary university is a testing ground for the financial control of cognitive labor. The university is an institution at the forefront of harnessing intellectual labor for the growth of what has been termed the "knowledge economy" not only through the production of knowledge commodities, but through the generation of set of ever-new sets of metrics to constantly measure, assess, quantify, and invest in intellectual labor. At the same time, the university is an innovator in deploying cutting-edge techniques for the creation and management of an ever more precarious, low-paid, and flexible workforce. Moreover, the university is a site through which the mechanisms of financial control have encroached on intellectual life through its facilitation of what I and others have argued is the most virulent and exploitative form of consumer debt in America, student loans. Through the system of predatory lending facilitated by the university, that which was thought to be outside of intellectual life has become its deepest internal limit; finance has been folded into the life of the mind. As the form of the contemporary university becomes ever more an expression these processes, we must revisit the underlying conditions of our thought and its unthought in order to create a politics based the resistance to the financialization of knowledge generally and the increasingly precarious conditions under which it is produced. What Mowitt adds to ongoing conversations around the university is an insistence that those of us in the humanities not lose sight of what it is we are struggling for, which cannot be reduced to better wages and the like, but is, importantly, the power to affirm the singular nature of our thinking beyond capital's ability to measure it. Though Mowitt distances himself from thinkers of intellectual labor, his argument that we "re:work" study as a "labor of affirmation" seems to resonate with what Gigi Roggero calls "living knowledge," a form of knowledge that, like living labor, does not need the legitimation of capital in order to affirm itself.

RESPONSE TO JOHN MOWITT'S "HUMANITIES AND THE UNIVERSITY IN RUIN" [*]

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John Mowitt's "The Humanities and the University in Ruins" unfolds with characteristic precision, elegance, and insight. Inviting his reader to desire a humanities that will have emancipated its inquiries from the two great forces that stifle it today, neoliberal political economy and Eurocentric knowledge production, Mowitt also steps aside from the rhetoric of crisis that for so long has been such an uncritically automatic part of the self-understanding of the humanities. Mowitt instead raises the question of the humanities within a much different lexicon, a lexicon some readers may be tempted to regard as not only heterodox but also antiquated: the labor theory of value. The result is a problematization of the humanities the central questions of which no longer derive from the rhetoric of crisis ("who are the internal and external enemies against whom the humanities must 'defend' itself?") but now in a much different set of questions, questions the difficulty of which makes the rhetoric of crisis seem consoling by contrast: What sort of labor is it that's entailed in the scholarly work of the humanities? What is it, exactly, that humanists do when they work? How is that work different than other sorts of work that takes place inside and outside of the late modern university? And what relation might exist between this work and the sorts of work and worklessness we witness today, in this moment of high crisis for late capitalism?

1.

Begin with the obvious: there's no lack of cause today for humanists to feel menaced. We read these days about the threat posed to the humanities by the invading forces of neoliberalism and market logic, on the one hand, and instrumental reason and the applied sciences, on the other hand. We read of the corporatisation and privatisation of the university, and the poisonous effects those processes have upon the humanities (whether it be the rising costs of books and tuition for students, or the inability of talented graduate students to find the permanent teaching positions they need in order to be able to do their work as researchers and teachers). We read of aggressive proposals to save the university (whether by "emancipating" it of its ostensibly outdated desire to unify knowledge under the rubric of the terminal B.A. degree, or by casting it into the sea of the Internet). And we read stories, seemingly increasing by the day, of administrators who arbitrarily and summarily close down humanities programs that allegedly cannot pay for their own operation costs, and that are said, with shockingly little evidence, to be a drain on limited institutional resources.

Confronted by all of this, one can understand why a self-identified humanist would feel compelled to defend the humanities, and in particular to defend the humanities to the public. And not just any public, but a specific public, the public figured as a *taxpaying* public, a public the definitive hallmark of which is its desire to know what exactly it's receiving in exchange for its annual contributions to state and federal government. [1] By defending itself to the public so understood, the humanities presumably would be able to explain the indispensability of scholarly work that otherwise would risk appearing perfectly dispensable. And it should come as no surprise that many humanists recently have done just this, dutifully explaining to their readers that humanists are those who ask what it means to be human; who preserve and transmit to future generations the best that has been thought and said; who

interpret texts from the past in their proper cultural and historical context; and who teach the habits of self-reflection and self-critique that are essential for any virtuous citizenship, especially for the sort of citizenship we imagine existing in the global age.

What's so curious about accounts of this sort, however, is how consistently the humanists who offer them betray, precisely in *the way* they offer their accounts, the very habits of thought they attempt to affirm *within* those same accounts. For example, defenders of the humanities sometimes like to quote *The Apology of Socrates* in support of the assertion that the essence of humanistic education is the discipline of constant self-examination, self-questioning, and self-criticism: "the unexamined life [*anexetastos bios*] is not worth living for a human being [*biōtos anthrōpōi*]." [2] And yet when the erstwhile defenders of the examined life find themselves questioned by the "taxpaying public," they oddly leave the concept of taxation precisely unexamined. The strangeness of this situation hardly can be underestimated: those who seek to defend the humanities to the public with reference to its hallmark discipline ("self-questioning") find themselves offering defenses in which they fail to question their own assumption of a concept, taxation, that the public, for its part (and different publics, needless to say, in different ways), *is* questioning (albeit, to be sure, with varying degrees of probity, intensity, and clarity). With a defense so self-defeating as this, is it really necessary for the humanities to await destruction from without?

How indeed should we understand the curious metonymy according to which "the public" to which humanists respond becomes implicitly figured as "the *taxpaying public*"? A loose association of this sort is not, of course, unprecedented: the office of the *publicanus*, in Roman Law, included the right to collect taxes. But what happens when taxation becomes the primary horizon for understanding the public's most basic concern, that element in public life to which one must speak inasmuch as one wishes really to speak to the public at all? More to the point, how might humanists' presuppositions about the figure of taxation—about the onus or burden taxation may or may not entail, about the toll it may or may not take on those who give it, about the relations it may or may not have to the gift—prefigure and implicitly govern the sorts of defenses humanists are inclined to give to the public of the humanities? Above all, what does it mean to be taxed, and why is it that, at a moment when the very notion of the tax seems to be the sharpest if most submerged edge of the attack on the humanities, so few humanists have elevated this notion to the level of an explicit problem for thought?

Even to be able to begin to take up these questions, to be sure, an immense amount of work would need to be done, most of which exceeds the scope of this text. One would need, for example, to inquire into the relation between the tax and the Roman Law concept of *munus*, this enigmatic term that, in a remarkable inquiry, Roberto Esposito has located as the mute but active kernel stirring within the notions of *communitas* and *immunitas*. [3] What we can and must address here, however, is the subtle but important appearance of taxation in the very text from which so many humanists today quote when they seek to defend the humanities to a skeptical public. In Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*, we find a Socrates who tries to argue that the city who wants to sentence him to death for impiety actually needs him more than it supposes. Without the stings and bites of philosophic questioning, the democratic public will not know what it is talking about, will not know what it wants, and may even revert to tyranny, destroying its own democracy. As swat-table as this stinging insect, this gadfly, might be, the public therefore actually should be grateful for this strange beast, this philosopher. After this defense fails, Socrates then makes a most surprising plea to his accusers. Instead of putting him to death, Socrates argues, the public should maintain him in the Prytaneum, the sacred center of Athenian community, drawing on the public purse to exempt him from the need to procure, for himself, the basic necessities of life (food and drink). The reasoning behind this proposal is even more surprising: without the leisure (*skolen*) this exemption gives him, the philosopher will be unable to undertake the important work of acting like an animal (an aggressive insect) toward

the very public whose taxes sustain his animal life (his *zoē*). [4] After this plea fails, as it must, we eventually find the Socrates of the *Crito*, the Socrates who could but does not flee his fate, and who instead willingly accepts his own capital punishment, in ostensibly wise obedience to the laws of the city, nobly drinking the poison the city has prepared for him.

Humanists who defend the humanities to the public today sometimes invoke the words of *The Apology of Socrates* in their defenses as if the conclusion of Socrates' defense—the sentence of death—were somehow not an essential and necessary part of that defense. But *The Apology of Socrates* is, as Kierkegaard argued, precisely a *defenseless* defense: it is an ironic defense, a defense of the examined life that, on principle, seems not at all designed to succeed in the task of defending the examined life. [5] It is a defense that, in fact, seems to find redeeming value in the ironic self-consciousness with which the philosopher willingly accepts the verdict, the decision for death, that is passed upon him by the tragically uncomprehending democratic public—a public that, above all, seems not to consent to the notion that its taxes ought to be spent to maintain the life a parasitic figure who, in turn, spends his leisure-time teaching the children of the rich how to bite and sting the very host that sustains them. Repurposed as a defense of the humanities, there's no reason to believe that the Socratic defense would operate any less aporetically. Humanists' habitual recourse to the Socratic, as a paradigm for defending the humanities to the taxpaying public, instead seems structured by an insoluble impasse. To the extent we read *The Apology of Socrates* unironically, as a trial the outcome of which could have been otherwise had the proponent of the "examined life" only represented himself in court with greater wisdom, our defense of the humanities in Socratic terms betrays the very tradition and the very figure in whose name we so confidently speak. But to the extent we read it ironically, as a constitutively defenseless defense, we will have reason to worry that the Socratic paradigm will offer to the humanities little more than the consolations of a tragic narrative plot, a plot that allows the humanities to pass away, but at least having died a noble death, a death more philosophic than unphilosophic, more ironic than unironic.

That there is therefore an important sense in which the Socratic paradigm is precisely *impossible* for the humanities to inherit does not, of course, diminish its necessity or even desirability for thinking about the humanities today. What it should cause us to doubt, however, is the self-evidence of references to the Socratic within the rhetoric of the defense of the humanities, particularly inasmuch as those references imply, as they often do, that the Socratic is not only the most obvious but also the best paradigm for thinking about the humanities. There is, after all, a clear prior condition on which the Socratic paradigm may succeed in representing itself as that part of the humanities whose plan for the preservation of the humanities, such as it is, can or should represent the future of the humanities as a whole: that we leave *undefended* the many modes of humanistic inquiry that *do not* consent to the privileged status of the Socratic paradigm. Here it's necessary to keep in mind an insight offered by Bruce Robbins some years ago: the figure of an "outside public" is usually conjured up within the academe by the consummate academic insider, who then treats this figure as a premise for defining and policing the range of legitimate work that may and may not take place inside the academe. [6] But even this sort of cunning machination can't escape the impasses of inheritance we've outlined above. For if anything, the Socratic lives on most forcefully today in those threads of humanistic inquiry whose commitment to incessant questioning leads them to chew up the enthymemes of the public, up to and including the enthymeme that the Socratic tradition is a precious legacy of Western civilization that must be protected at all costs. In this case, the explicitly Socratic defense of the humanities, precisely to the extent it succeeds in persuading the taxpaying public to maintain only those humanistic inquiries that appear to conform to the Socratic mode, will run the risk of expelling from the humanities the humanities' most impious, and for that same reason most implicitly Socratic, questions. This, of course, would be tragic. But it would not be the first time in the history of disciplinary

reason that an academic discipline will have sought, as the condition for its own self-preservation, to purge from itself its excessively proximate doubles, *its scapegoats, its pharmakoi*. [7]

2.

By formulating the question of the humanities not in juridical terms (i.e., in terms of *apologia* or "defense"), but in terms of labor, Mowitt effects a decisive re-orientation of the Socratic paradigm: he recapitulates much more fully than do even the often complacent proponents of the Socratic paradigm one of the aporias that troubles that paradigm from within. It's well-known that the Greek term in Plato's *The Apology of Socrates* usually translated with the English "leisure" is one of those great Freudian words, a word with a forgotten, and to that same degree revealing, etymological itinerary. The word in question, *skolē*, would give rise first to the Latin *schola*, and thence, via the Latin, to more familiar terms such as "scholar" and "school." Etymologically, at least, terms like "scholarly work" or "works of scholarship" are thus the site for something very much like a *contradiction in terms*, signifying in effect a kind of work the indispensable condition for which is, especially in Plato, the very opposite of work. And whereas many if not most of today's defenders of the humanities remain silent on this aporia, preferring instead more automatic claims about the "unexamined life," Mowitt raises its contemporary iteration to the level of a problem of the first and highest order. With what terms may we speak about work that appears not to be work at all—that, even and especially in its most assiduous forms, seems to entail inactivity and idleness (or, to gloss Nietzsche, ""sitting on one's ass" [8])? And what does it mean *to speak of such work today*, at a moment not only when so many both outside and inside the academe are without work, but also when revolutions in techniques of information storage and retrieval seem to give to so many the ability to perform something very much resembling scholarly work?

The significance of Mowitt's text consists not least in his attempt to develop a lexicon to respond to such questions. It's not for nothing that the "re:" in Mowitt's "re: working" abbreviates the "re-" that many electronic mail programs automatically generate in their "Subject" heading when users indicate through keystrokes their desire to produce a "response" to an incoming message. With this, Mowitt seems to want to ask us to think "working" within the framework of late modern information technology, where, taken to the extreme, it becomes the name not of this or that particular type of work but of another aporia, this one pertaining less to "scholarly work" in the humanities than to the conditions under which that work is reproduced—or, even more to the point, the sense in which that work consists of *nothing other than* reproducibility, or at least, of reproducibility of a specific sort.

On the one hand, it seems axiomatic that no work in the humanities can take place that is not also, or even primarily, involved in the reproduction of this or that tradition, the transmission of this or that inheritance. This, it would seem, was one of the basic stakes in the "culture wars" that raged in the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s: behind the explicit disagreement over which inheritances should be transmitted to students, there seemed to have been implicit agreement on the premise that the general function of humanities, understood now as an administrative unit within the modern university, was the reproduction and transmission of knowledge about culture. The prior conditions for knowledge's reproducibility and transmissibility, however, are that it assume the form of a trace, and that these traces, in turn, be recorded and inscribed, archived and instituted, safeguarded and storehoused, in specific sorts of technical apparatuses (primarily, but not exclusively, books and libraries). [9] If it is true that there can be no humanities without the transmissibility or reproducibility of knowledge, so too, in other words, can there be no humanities that does not in some way rely on *technē*. And although humanists habitually speak of technics as the constitutive exterior of the humanities (whether in the form of the "instrumental reason" of the

natural and social sciences, or as the "vocational-technical" training against which the humanities defined itself in the twentieth century), it thus would be more precise to say that one of the primary functions of the humanities, perhaps even its very vocation, is impossible without technics, or, in short, that technics of a certain sort is the indispensable condition for the continued existence of the humanities.

On the other hand, however, the humanities' presupposition of technics is precisely also the site at which the humanities seems most vulnerable to crisis, even to terminal crisis. This vulnerability, we would want to insist, is different from, though not of course unrelated to, the various crises the humanities has identified for itself as the threats that menace it in the immediate present. It's one that owes its specific torque and thrust to the "permanent crisis" of capitalist innovation, which for decades now has focused its forces nowhere more intently than on instruments of information storage and retrieval. To truly grasp the nettle of this crisis, Marx's insights into the dynamics of capitalist "permanent revolution" are, far from being antiquated, more imperative than ever. The miraculous technologies created within the framework of capitalism (such as electronic mail, whose automated "re:" Mowitt asks us to rethink) consistently produce, as one of their regularly side-effects, the potential for the increasing superfluity of certain sorts of workers (say, postal workers, whose "inflexible" contracts have been, in the U.S. at least, the source of considerable neoliberal criticism).

[10] Whence the importance of Mowitt's "re: working": de-abbreviated, it sends us a message about the need to respond to the teletechnical conditions for the crisis of "scholarly work" today. Apparatuses of information technology, on which humanistic work in the university increasingly depend and even affirm, also function to render humanistic work increasingly dispensable.

And not in the future tense, either. As various polemicists recently have made perfectly clear, the internet and its cousins give us the ability to reconcile the conflict between, on the one hand, too many universities that cannot control their rising costs and, on the other hand, too many students who cannot afford the rising costs of tuition. [11] This apparent "win-win solution" clearly will have special application in developing economies, whose need or desire to finance the creation of new institutions of higher education will be undercut, if not supplanted altogether, by the existing supply of knowledge flowing in from northern satellites, databases, and digitized archives. For these polemicists, who in effect seek to resuscitate the old Arnoldian mission of the humanities now within a horizon defined by information technology (the euphemistic watchword of which is "access") and neoliberal political economy (which reduces all to the temporariness of consumer choice under the watchword of "flexibility"), it's perfectly obvious that all this flesh, all this stiff brick and mortar, is no longer necessary or even desirable as a means for accomplishing the end, as it were, of the humanities. The screen on which these words appear, those flickering pixels there in your eye—all of this, inasmuch as it heralds the coming superfluity of the university and its workers, conveys the counterintuitive threat that a certain humanities, a radically abbreviated humanities, shall survive *the end of the university*, and this not despite but precisely because of the technics it presupposes.

All of this, it would seem, is in play in the lexicon Mowitt offers us for rethinking the specific sort of "scholarly work" the humanities entails. The decisive point would be that the forces which threaten to stifle the humanities derive less from the outside of the humanities, than from its extimate interior, from the non-identity with itself of the very "scholarly work" that defines its innermost inside. On this understanding, the conditions that allow for the humanities' normal operation also require it to remain open and exposed to the very dynamics that threaten it with with obsolescence. To protect itself against this threat (say, by reacting to the desacralizing touch of teletechnics by withdrawing from it altogether, by resacralizing the book and the experience of reading), would be to negate its very conditions of possibility, and thence too to guarantee its obsolescence (repeating, only now in contemporary forms, the

archaic esotericism of Plato's academe, Aristotle's school, or the Thomistic monastery [12]). And yet the threat is not imagined, and the liquefying, profaning energies of capitalist crisis, as experienced this time by humanists, cannot be outstripped by displacing the ailment upon scapegoats internal (the various figures of impiety today, e.g., "queer theory," "antihumanism," "postcolonialism," "cultural studies," etc.) or external ("instrumental reason," "administrators," the "taxpaying public," etc.). The predicament at the core of the crisis of the humanities is, on this read, a specific declension of the same predicament that's intensifying by the day in other domains of late modern capitalism, where the reproduction of capital demands double-or-nothing bets on constant technical innovation, and where no new technical innovation comes into being absent the potential to produce populations whose life and labor is, precisely, superfluous for capitalist reproduction. And if in recent years this crisis seems more concentrated in the university than elsewhere, not only is this no reason to defend the humanities in the usual Socratic mode; it's all the more reason *to de-automate* the humanities' response to questions about the nature of its "scholarly work," suspending our *mechanized references to paradigms of the "unexamined life,"* in order to respond now anew to the increasingly distressed experience of work of which the crisis of the humanities is, in the end, but a metonym.

3.

Which leads, in closing, to a thought on Mowitt's own response. If humanistic scholarship is a sort of work, and if Mowitt's discourse is an example of humanistic scholarship, then what sort of scholarly work do we find exemplified in his discourse? Of what sort of scholarly work, in other words, might Mowitt's text be paradigmatic? The difficulty of the question is hardly decreased by the fact that Mowitt's discourse unfolds not only by recalling but also by breaking with various paradigms of academic labor. What then is the paradigm for a type of scholarly work that seems to consist mainly or even exclusively of relinquishing prior paradigms of scholarly work? What sort of work is it that, by showing painstakingly how each of these paradigms dehisces from within, seems to leave us at a loss for examples to illuminate our work? And what if loss, or at least some relation to loss, were in fact an essential part of this work? What if, in other words, work in the humanities were to consist in a relationship not only to the texts of the past, as some humanists claim, but more precisely to texts that imply the death of their author and addressee (or, in other words, *all* texts [13])? Would we then agree that no fully self-conscious work in the humanities could proceed without recognizing the extent to which it entails the work of mourning?

What work is that? Writing in the wake of World War I, not long before Walter Benjamin began writing his great work on *Trauerspiel*, Freud began outlining a paradigm of "normal" grief in which the work of grieving (*Trauerarbeit*) entailed the work of a particular sort of remembering. Faced with the loss of an object I love (whether a loved person or some abstraction that has taken the place of a person), I recall the lost object obsessively and involuntarily, in extraordinary detail. Not despite but because of the pain involved in this recollection, I find myself able to divest myself of my libidinal "investments" in the lost object, to reinvest myself in a substitute object, and in so doing to rediscover my very desire to live, returning myself once more to the living present, where I find anew an ability, the ability to say "I," I'd lost in the pneumonia of my grief. In the case of melancholia, by contrast, my mourning-work hits up against an insuperable limit. Even, especially, in my obsessive recollections of the lost object, I can't bring myself to recall that my investments in this object consist not only of love but also of hate. I thus find that my ability to "work through" my loss is resisted by a force, my ambivalence, that I can't admit to myself, that's too great for me to recall or break through. In this "pathological" case of mourning, not only do I never recover my ability to say "I," I also begin to identify with the lost object I now interminably mourn, incorporating into

my own voice and gaze the voice and gaze of the lost object. I place myself outside of myself, over there in the darkness of my loss, the place from which I'm seen, but into which I can't see. If in the case of "normal" mourning, I decathect from the outside world, regarding it as destitute and forlorn, in the "pathological" case of melancholia, I decathect from "me," regarding my very "ego" as an abject, impoverished, and worthless thing, as refuse or waste. I continue to say "I," but in an important sense the "I" from whose standpoint I speak is no longer a living "I." It's a dead "I," an "I" that accuses me all the more constantly and mercilessly for the fact that it speaks to me from a position to which I'm unable to respond, and yet into the irreversible silence of which I'm increasingly drawn, through the agency of an awful mimesis. [14]

It is striking how closely the clinical symptoms of pathological mourning seem to resemble humanists' self-descriptions of the normal practices of humanistic work. The humanist, just like the melancholic, seems to work by taking himself as the object of an incessant criticism, turning his "subjectivity" into the "object" of a critical knowledge the techniques of which he then seeks to transmit to his students (sometimes in the form of "conscience"). The humanist, also like the melancholic, not infrequently seems to identify himself with a dead person whose name (or, more often, patronym, for much discourse on mourning is a discourse of fathers and sons) he incorporates into his account of himself, where it then functions precisely as a name for the sort of work he does (where statements of the sort, "I am a Platonist" mean nothing other than the incorporation of Plato's voice and views into one's own voice and views). For some working in the humanities, the elegiac quality of humanistic work would appear to be in no need of elaboration: the explicit purpose of the humanities, for these scholars, is to preserve existing traditions of thought—traditions that, but for the perpetual requiem that keeps them alive for generation upon generation of students, will have become lost once and for all to oblivion. For these humanists—whose work is, needless to say, the most endangered by the emergence of information retrieval systems—the more obsessive and detailed the recollection, the more faithfully the lost object is conjured up, resurrected, saved from oblivion, and transmitted to new generations, the better the humanistic work is as such. For others working in the humanities, by contrast, the point of humanistic work would seem not to be to protect against the potential loss of existing traditions, but to mourn and repair traditions that would have existed in a more robust form but for their traumatic damage, or even outright destruction, by "crimes which men can neither punish nor forgive." [15] The latter is of course very different from, even opposed to the former: the former is inclined toward a narrative of decline (that the best that has been thought and said is at risk of being degraded and lost), the latter toward a narrative of grievance (that the sufficient condition for any fully self-conscious work in the humanities is answerability for the inhumanity with which existing humanistic traditions have hitherto coexisted). But despite these differences, they seem to share a similar lexicon: loss, though of very different modalities and relating to very different traditions and objects, would seem to provide these otherwise opposed humanists with the vocabulary for speaking about their scholarly work. Humanists, on this read, would have more than a little in common with Zakes Mda's "professional mourners" [16]; they would be professional melancholics.

For at least one heterodox thinker of institutions, this would amount to more than a mere *prima facie* resemblance. In his 1977 essay "The Institution of Rot," Michel de Certeau outlined the subjective conditions of possibility for institutions that seek to reproduce and transmit such high ideals such as "meaning, right, or truth." [17] On de Certeau's account, the public work of these institutions depends on a prior work, an intimate and even secret work, a particular sort of work of the self upon the self. Before I'm able to fill myself with the great voices and views I then reproduce and transmit in and to the public, I first must convert myself into an empty vessel capable of containing those voices and views. But the prior work by which I accomplish this conversion is nothing other than the abjection that is the hallmark of melancholia: only by first establishing for myself that "I'm not worthy" am I then able to

hollow myself out in the manner demanded of me by my institution's public dimension, turning myself into a receptacle capable of hosting a voice and gaze that, in contrast to my own, do possess value. Melancholic dispositions (affects of filth, corruption, and putrescence) are thus the indispensable condition for the transmission of sublime inheritances, for the conversion of the self into one of those technical apparatuses that's able to operate as a device for the transmissibility of tradition. Far from being *the opposite* of technics, melancholia is here the mode or mood *specific to* technics, at least a technics of a very specific sort: it's the primary means through which institutions of "meaning, right, and truth" administer the "rot" they secretly require (but also, of course, publicly disavow) as the subjective condition for their normal operation.

Mowitt is, needless to say, anything but silent on the work of mourning. He begins by explicitly placing his inquiry into the university under the interpretive key of the Benjaminian figure of "ruins," which he takes up from a scholar, Bill Readings, who died before his time; and he ends by discussing how it is that we might think death and negativity without the consolations of dialectical reason. But even though Mowitt's response "re: working" seems therefore to participate in the work of mourning, it would be off the mark to treat this proximity as an identity. To affirm the work of the humanities, as Mowitt invites us to, it would seem necessary to render inoperative the apparatus of professional melancholia. More to the point, it would seem necessary to think the trace of death entailed in every text—up to and including the sort of trace that, in the age of teletechnical information storage and retrieval, allows for the death of the humanities. This would be a trace that the institution administers in its subjects, that it sets to work upon us and sets us in turn to work upon, but that, despite or because of its status as the dead center of scholarly work in the humanities, the institution cannot think on its own terms. From this perspective, the most exemplary work of Mowitt's text would be its resistance to and distance from the very paradigm of grief-work to which its "re: working" is otherwise so constantly close. It's as if the work of mourning were even the main sort of work that humanists need to rework in order to begin affirming their work, as if the future of the humanities would begin when we can affirm even, especially, the loss of the discourse of loss. As if, rather than continue to work in an institution of rot, we could inaugurate instead a relation to text that, existing as it does at the vanishing point between *Trauerarbeit* and *Trauerspiel*, between a certain kind of work and a certain kind of play, in turn heralds an experience, that of unalienated labor, the very idea of which our self-destructive democracies seem to need, today more than ever, to ridicule and to deny.

ANTE-ANTI-BLACKNESS: AFTERTHOUGHTS [1]

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In his article, "Theory in Black," Lewis Gordon writes the following:

Theory in black...is...a phobogenic designation. It occasions anxiety of thought; it is theory in jeopardy. [...] There is a form of illicit seeing...at the very beginnings of seeing black, which makes a designation of seeing in black, theorizing, that is, in black, more than oxymoronic. It has the mythopoetics of sin. [...] Blackness, in all its metaphors and historical submergence, reaches out to theory, then, as theory split from itself. It is the dark side of theory, which, in the end, is none other than *theory itself*, understood as self-reflective, outside itself (Gordon 2010: 196-8).

I am guided in the following task by a two-sided idea derived from Gordon's arguments: 1) all thought, insofar as it is genuine thinking, might best be conceived of as black thought and, consequently, 2) all researches, insofar as they are genuinely critical inquiries, aspire to black studies. Blackness is theory itself, anti-blackness the resistance to theory. I suspect that this premise might help us to re-frame questions of theory in cultural studies by referring to - or forging - another criterion of evaluation. The pedagogical thrust of this comment emerges from recurrent questions arising from my undergraduate teaching in the Program in African American Studies and my graduate teaching in the Culture and Theory Ph.D. Program and the Critical Theory Emphasis at the University of California, Irvine, and from research conducted for a recent Social Text article entitled, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery" (2010). The questions, though they have been around for some time now, remain relatively young in the historic instance: Are there multiple forms or species of racism or simply variations of a fundamental structure? If it is the latter, what provides the model or matrix (colonialism, slavery, anti-Semitism)? Or is racism, rather, a singular history of violent conjunctures? [2] Can anti-racist politics be approached in ways that denaturalize the color line, retain the specificities of discrepant histories of racialization, and think through their relational formation? "People-of-Color-Blindness" serves as an initial response to such questions and a sort of extended preface to my comments below. There I attempted to examine the re-figuration of slavery and its afterlife [3] within the field of black studies, paying special attention to the theoretical status of the concept of "social death" since its introduction by Orlando Patterson in his synthetic 1982 study, *Slavery and Social Death* (Harvard UP). For Patterson, the social death of slavery is comprised of three basic elements: 1) total powerlessness, 2) natal alienation or "the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations" (Patterson 1982: 7), and 3) generalized dishonor, this last element being a direct effect of the previous two. Adjudicating the explanatory power of Patterson's *magnum opus*, then, bears on matters of political and social theory (i.e., power), law (i.e., right) and philosophy (i.e., ontology, epistemology and ethics) as much as history and historiography (i.e., the archive and the question of writing). So, aside from acknowledging the veritable explosion in social, cultural, economic and geographic histories of slavery in the last twenty years, [4] the latter and more specific focus of this comment involves an exploration of the emergent tension between the formulations of "afro-pessimism" and "black optimism" offered respectively in Frank B. Wilderson's 2010 *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke UP) and Fred Moten's recent series of articles in the journals *Criticism* ("The Case of Blackness" 50:2 [2009]), *PMLA* ("Black Ops" 123:5 [2008]), and *CR: The New Centennial Review* ("Knowledge of Freedom" 4:2 [2005]). The

wager here is that the details of what might seem at first to be a highly technical dispute in a small corner of the American academy will reveal themselves to be [illuminating comments on the guiding assumptions and operative terms of the field of black studies](#) particularly and the range of cultural studies more generally, both in and beyond the United States.

For Wilderson, afro-pessimism takes seriously the *longue durée* of social death in Atlantic history and thereby pursues an investigation of "the meaning of Blackness not - in the first instance - as a variously and unconsciously interpellated *identity* or as a conscious social actor [animated by legible political interests], but as a structural *position* of non-communicability in the face of all other positions" (Wilderson 2010: 58, emphasis added).

Wilderson's procedure here is something like the abstraction of a conceptual framework (regarding structural positionality), a methodology (regarding paradigmatic analysis) and a structure of feeling (regarding the politics of antagonism) that, taken together, remain implicit in the work of various luminaries of black studies but whose full implications only become available when they are rendered explicit and raised to another level of theorization.

[5] Moten, in his turn, forwards a notion of black optimism drawn from his longstanding meditation on the relation between black politics and black musical performance and this notion is meant, in part, to counter or reposition the premises of afro-pessimism by holding the force of black agency to be logically and ontologically *prior* to the construction of a social order characterized by anti-blackness - "the resistance that *constitutes* constraint," as he phrases it elsewhere. [6] I think it important that the shifting line of distinction progressively marked out between the theoretical tendencies I have just sketched turns in crucial ways on their real or imagined ability to think about what Wilderson calls "the political ontology of race" not only alongside and through a history of capitalism and the emergence of the modern nation-state, [7] but also with respect to formations of gender and sexuality as mutually constituting categories of differentiation. [8] We are dealing here with both [the challenges of analytical description and the desire for political prescription](#).

The productive friction at the heart of this endeavor, generating equal parts heat and light, was already evident throughout the two-day symposium I organized in 2006 at the University of California, Irvine. That gathering, entitled "Black Thought in the Age of Terror," brought together some of the most prominent voices in black studies to comment on a range of issues that each understood to be of significance for the field in the early twenty-first century. [9] In that venue, it became clear that any claim about the contemporary persistence of black social death for an analysis of the afterlife of slavery would have to contend with the insistence of black social life, and vice versa. Put somewhat differently, something more complicated was afoot than the oft-noted dialectic of slavery and freedom, or power and resistance, something like an intimacy of the two terms that arrayed them less as opposites and more as conditions of an impossible possibility.

In fact, this theoretical problematic reaches back quite a bit further, at least to Moten's critical engagement with Saidiya Hartman's landmark text, *Scenes of Subjection* (Oxford UP, 1997), first in his 1999 book review for the journal *TDR: The Drama Review* and then again in 2003 in the opening pages of his first major work, *In the Break* (Duke UP). Since then, this critical engagement has been extended further by Daphne Brooks' *Bodies in Dissent* (Duke UP, 2006) and by Jayna Brown's *Babylon Girls* (Duke UP, 2008), for instance, but one might understand this massive and often convoluted exchange as bound up in an even more profound contest over the proper reading of the entire *oeuvre* of Hortense Spillers, the leading theoretical figure in the field of critical black studies over the last thirty years. That is also to say that it is a question of the most basic political and intellectual *orientation* of black feminism, the ground wire of black studies as such, in the post-civil rights era and beyond. The upshot of this meditation lies in the collective opportunity to revisit and revise Giorgio Agamben's grand urging in his *Means without Ends* (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000) to "abandon decidedly, without reservation, the fundamental concepts through which we have so far represented the subjects of the political" in order to "build our political philosophy anew"

(16). It is hoped that in our pursuit of this renewal of categories of thought in and through the history of racial slavery, we might better apprehend the prospects for a future of freedom and justice to come.

In "The Case of Blackness," Moten is concerned with a strife internal to the field formation of black studies, internal, moreover, to the black (radical) tradition [10] that black studies is or seeks out as institutional inscription, a "strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms" that he argues, persuasively, "is essential not only to contemporary black academic discourse but also to the discourses of the barbershop, the beauty shop, and the bookstore" (Moten 2008: 178). Put slightly differently, there is a strife within the black (radical) tradition between "radicalism (here understood as the performance of a general critique of the proper)" and a "normative striving against the grain of the very radicalism from which the desire for norms is derived" (Moten 2008: 177). [11] If radicalism gives rise to the desire for norms, like a river from source water or a tree from roots, if the general critique of the proper gives rise to the desire for propriety (in the fullest sense of the term) and not vice versa, then our prevailing notion of critique – and the forms and sources of our critical activity – is put profoundly into question, and, I think, rightly so. It would mean, at the very least, that we could not, as Nahum Chandler ably demonstrates, analytically presuppose "the system in which the subordination takes place," in this case the system of racial slavery, and then insert the subjects or objects of that system "into this pre-established matrix to engage in their functional articulation of the permutations prescribed therein" (Chandler 2000: 261). Instead, we would have to account for "the *constitution* of general system or structure" and not just its *operational* dynamics (ibid, emphasis added). [12] Moten finds examples of this prevailing notion of critique in a certain moment of Fanon and, consequently, in a citation and elaboration or resonance of Fanon in a 2003 article, "Raw Life," that I co-authored with Huey Copeland for the journal *Qui Parle* (Sexton & Copeland 2003). There are other references in Moten's piece, less perceptible, to an interview with Saidiya Hartman conducted by Frank B. Wilderson, III for the same issue under the title, "The Position of the Unthought" (Hartman 2003). There are references, by extension, to Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) and *Lose Your Mother* (2007) and to Wilderson's *Red, White and Black* (2008), as well as to some of the sources that the latter draws upon in his own formulation: Kara Keeling's *The Witch's Flight* (2007), David Marriott's *On Black Men* (2000), Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001). All of these works are addressed to the extent that they are said to share "an epistemological consensus broad enough to include Fanon, on the one hand, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, on the other – encompassing formulations that might be said not only to characterize but also to initiate and continually re-initialize the philosophy of the human sciences." (Moten 2008: 188). [13] That's curious company, of course, but that's precisely the point.

In the same vein, and based on a reading "raw life" as a synonym rather than an opening toward another frame of reference, Moten rails against what he sees in "a certain American reception of Agamben" as a "critical obsession with bare life" that "fetishizes the bareness of it all" (Moten 2008: 216 fn. 6). [14] What is unattended or forgotten in this "constant repetition of bare life," which is how Moten reads this troubled and troubling reading of Fanon *avec* Agamben, is an engagement with Agamben's (affirmative) notion of "form of life." And here one is unfaithful to the best of Agamben if one's theorization "separates life from the form of life," just as one is unfaithful to the best of Foucault if one overlooks his "constant and unconcealed assumptions of life's fugitivity" in support of a mistaken conviction that misattributes to the great French historian and political philosopher a thesis about the absoluteness of power (ibid). What links these two observations – a strife internal to black studies and a failure in the understanding of power – is a relation of mutual implication. A central point of "The Case of Blackness" obtains in a caution against and a correction of the tendency to depart from the faulty premise of black pathology and thereby carry along the discourse being criticized within the assumptions of the critique. If one misunderstands the nature of power in this way, then one will more than likely assume or, at least, agree to the pathology of blackness and vice versa. Chandler might identify this entanglement less with a problem of attitude and more with an error

of judgment. Wilderson's concurrence with the spirit of this gambit would, in turn, warn against the tendency to "fortify and extend the interlocutory life of widely accepted political common sense" and its theoretical underpinnings (Wilderson 2008: 36).

However, before we adjudicate whether the authors of "Raw Life" or the dossier of articles that it introduces or, for that matter, Fanon himself truly suffer from "an explicatory velocity that threatens to abolish the distance between, which is also to say the nearness of" a whole range of conceptual pairs requiring a finer attunement to "their difference and its modalities" (Moten 2008: 182); I think it paramount to adjudicate whether the fact that "blackness has been associated with a certain sense of decay" is, in the first instance, something that we ought to strain against as it strains against us. And even if, in the last instance, we decide to stay the course, need we mobilize a philosophy of life in order to do so? To interrogate "the racial discourses of life philosophy" is to demonstrate that the question of life cannot be pried apart from that thorniest of problems: "the problem of the Negro as a problem for thought," that dubious and doubtless "fact of blackness," or what I will call, in yet another register, the social life of social death. [15] This is as much an inquiry about the nature of nature as it is about the politics of nature and the nature of politics; in other words, it is meta-political no less than it is meta-physical. The question that remains is whether a politics that affirms (social) life can avoid the thanatological dead end if it does not will its own (social) death. David Marriott might call this, with Fanon, "the need to affirm affirmation through negation...not as a moral imperative...but as a psychopolitical necessity" (Marriott 2007: 273 fn. 9). [16]

As noted, Patterson first developed the concept in question for an academic audience in his encyclopedic 1982 survey, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, and surprisingly little elaboration followed in the wake of his intellectual contribution and the minor controversy it spurred. That debate, played out in the pages of book reviews and, sometime thereafter, in passing references to the earlier work in scholarly articles and books, generally invoked a caricature of the concept as already debunked. Not that there isn't much in Patterson to worry about, especially if one were interested to examine how aspects of the neoliberalism he would eventually come to embrace are embedded in prototypical form in his *magnum opus* and in earlier writings from before the commencement of the Reagan/Bush era proper. Consider, on this score, comments by V.P. Franklin (at this writing President's Chair and Distinguished Professor of History and Education at the University of California, Riverside) in his review for the *Journal of Negro History*:

The large gap in our knowledge of global slavery "from the perspective of the dominated" still needs to be filled. Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* provides us with a great deal of information on the legal status of slaves and freedpeople from ancient times to the present, but his lack of knowledge of ancient and modern languages and his dependence upon secondary sources limits the value of the work for researchers who have moved beyond "the World the Slaveholders Made" to an analysis of what it was like "To Be A Slave." And his inadequate and outdated discussion of slave life and culture in this country makes the work of questionable value to historians and social scientists interested in the Afro-American experience in the United States (Franklin 1983: 215-6).

The negative estimation is two-fold: on the one hand, Patterson is unable and uninterested in writing history from the perspective of the dominated (which is a way of saying that he is unable and uninterested in writing history *for* the dominated); on the other, Patterson nonetheless takes the liberty of speaking about the dominated and the result is travesty. Franklin draws up a review article Patterson penned for the pages of *The New Republic*, while at work on the study that would become *Slavery and Social Death*, in order to establish in Patterson an acute condescension toward the career of the African American in the United States that may suggest something about the conceptual framework more generally. In registering

profound disagreement with one of the principal arguments of Eugene Genovese's Bancroft Award-winning 1974 study, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, Patterson denounces the "Afro-American cultural system" as a "limited creed - indulgently pedestrian and immediate in its concerns, lacking in prophetic idealism, a total betrayal of the profound eschatology and heroic ideals of their African ancestors" (quoted in *ibid*: 215). Patterson goes on: "It was not a heritage to be passed on. Like their moral compromises, this was a social adaptation with no potential for change, a total adjustment to the demands of plantation life and the authoritarian dictates of the masters" (*ibid*). And the fatal blow: "A people, to deserve the respect of their descendents, must do more than merely survive spiritually and physically. There is no intrinsic value in survival, no virtue in the reflexes of the cornered rat" (*ibid*). Though I've been called worse, one can understand with little effort why an eminent scholar writing in the *Journal of Negro History* (Franklin, incidentally, is now Editor of the renamed *Journal of African American History*) might chafe against the suggestion that the masthead of said academic venue contained an oxymoron. We will call Patterson's verdict here an instance of the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of analysis, insofar as that analysis posits the presupposition of its object. One might think, with Franklin, that a shift in perspective from slaveholder to slave slips the knot of the hermeneutic circle. But the question of the constitution of the system (or whole), Chandler reminds us above, is also the question of the constitution of those subjects or objects (or parts) whose functional distribution plots the operations of the system.

Whereas Patterson's detractors take to task his historical sociology for its inability and unwillingness to fully countenance the agency of the perspective and self-predicating activity of the slave, his supporters (or those engaging his work through generous critique) do not fail to remark, even if they rarely highlight, that what is most stunning is the fact that the concept of social death cannot be generalized. It is indexed to slavery and it does not travel. That is, there are problems in the formulation of the relation of power from which slavery arises and there are problems in the formulation of the relation of this relation of power to other relations of power. This split reading was evident immediately, as indicated in a contemporaneous review by Ross K. Baker. Baker observes, against the neoconservative backlash politics of "angry white males" and the ascendance of another racialized immigration discourse alternating, *post*-civil rights, between model minority and barbarians at the gate: "The mere *fact* of slavery makes black Americans different. No amount of tortured logic could permit the analogy to be drawn between a former slave population and an immigrant population, no matter how low-flung the latter group. Indeed, had the Great Society programs persisted at their highest levels until today, it is doubtful that the mass of American blacks would be measurably better off than they are now" (Baker 1983: 21). Baker's refusal of analogy in the wake of his reading of Patterson is pegged to a certain realization "brought home," as he puts it, "by the daunting force of Patterson's description of the bleak totality of the slave experience" (*ibid*). I want to hold onto this perhaps unwitting distinction that Baker draws between the mere fact of slavery, on the one hand, and the daunting force of description of the slave *experience*, on the other. In this distinction, Baker echoes both the problem identified by Moten in his reading of my co-authored piece as a certain conflation of the fact of blackness with the lived experience of the black (Moten 2008: 179) and the problem identified by Hartman as a certain conflation of witness and spectator before the scenes of subjection at the heart of slavery (Hartman 1997: 4). I concede that Moten's delineation is precise (though its pertinence is in doubt) and that it encourages a more sophisticated theoretical practice, but Hartman's conclusion, it seems to me, is also accurate in a sort of non-contradictory coincidence or overlap with Moten that situates black studies in a relation field that is still generally under-theorized. Rather than approaching (the theorization of) social death and (the theorization of) social life as an "either/or" proposition, then, why not attempt to think them as a matter of "both/and"? Why not articulate them through the supplementary logic of the copula? In fact, there might be a more radical rethinking available yet.

In recent years, social death has emerged from a period of latency as a notion useful for the critical theory of racial slavery as a matrix of social, political, and economic relations

surviving the era of abolition in the nineteenth century, "a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago." This "afterlife of slavery," as Saidiya Hartman terms it, challenges practitioners in the field to question the prevailing understanding of a post-emancipation society and to revisit the most basic questions about the structural conditions of anti-blackness in the modern world. To ask what it means to speak of "the tragic continuity between slavery and freedom" or "the incomplete nature of emancipation", indeed to speak of about a type of living on that survives after a type of death. For Wilderson, the principal implication of slavery's afterlife is to warrant an intellectual disposition of "afro-pessimism," a qualification and a complication of the assumptive logic of black cultural studies in general and black performance studies in particular, a disposition that posits a political ontology dividing the Slave from the world of the Human in a constitutive way. This critical move has been misconstrued as a negation of the agency of black performance, or even a denial of black social life, and a number of scholars have reasserted the earlier assumptive logic in a gesture that hypostatizes afro-pessimism to that end. [17]

What I find most intriguing about the timbre of the argument of "The Case of Blackness" and the black optimism it articulates against a certain construal of afro-pessimism is the way that it works away from a discourse of black pathology only to swerve right back into it as an ascription to those found to be taking up and holding themselves in "the stance of the pathologist" in relation to black folks. [18] I say this not only because there is, in this version of events, a recourse to psychoanalytic terminology ("fetishization," "obsession," "repetition,"), but also because there is at the heart of the matter a rhetorical question that establishes both the bad advice of a wild analysis and a tacit diagnosis affording a certain speaker's benefit: "So why is it repressed?" The "it" that has been afflicted by the psychopathology of obsessional neurosis is the understanding, which is also to say the celebration, of the ontological priority or previousness of blackness relative to the anti-blackness that establishes itself against it, a priority or previousness that is also termed "knowledge of freedom" or, pace Chandler, comprehension of "the constitutive force of the African American subject(s)" (Chandler 2000: 261).

What does not occur here is a consideration of the possibility that something might be unfolding in the project or projections of afro-pessimism "knowing full well the danger of a kind of negative reification" associated with its analytical claims to the paradigmatic (Moten 2004: 279). That is to say, it might just be the case that an object lesson in the phenomenology of the thing is a gratuity that folds a new encounter into older habits of thought through a re-inscription of (black) pathology that reassigns its cause and relocates its source without ever really getting inside it. [19] In a way, what we're talking about relates not to a disagreement about "unthought positions" (and their de-formation) but to a disagreement, or discrepancy, about "unthought dispositions" (and their in-formation). I would maintain this insofar as the misrecognition at work in the reading of that motley crew listed in the ninth footnote regards, perhaps ironically, the performative dimension or signifying aspect of a "generalized impropriety" so improper as to appear as the same old propriety returning through the back door. [20] Without sufficient consideration of the gap between statement and enunciation here, to say nothing of quaint notions like context or audience or historical conjuncture, the discourse of afro-pessimism, even as it approaches otherwise important questions, can only seem like a "tragically neurotic" instance of "certain discourse on the relation between blackness and death" (Moten 2007: 9). [21]

Fanon and his interlocutors, or what appear rather as his fateful adherents, would seem to have a problem embracing black social life because they never really come to believe in it, because they cannot acknowledge the social life from which they speak and of which they speak - as negation and impossibility - as their own (Moten 2008: 192). Another way of putting this might be to say that they are caught in a performative contradiction enabled by disavowal. I wonder, however, whether things are even this clear in Fanon and the readings his writing might facilitate. Lewis Gordon's sustained engagement with Fanon finds him situated in an ethical

stance grounded in the affirmation of blackness in the historic anti-black world. In a response to the discourse of multiracialism emergent in the late twentieth-century United States, for instance, Gordon writes, following Fanon, that "there is no way to reject the thesis that there is something wrong with being black beyond the willingness to 'be' black - not in terms of convenient fads of playing blackness, but in paying the costs of anti-blackness on a global scale. Against the raceless credo, then, racism cannot be rejected without a dialectic in which humanity experiences a blackened world" (Gordon 1997: 67). What is this willingness to 'be' black, of choosing to be black affirmatively rather than reluctantly, that Gordon finds as the key ethical moment in Fanon?

Elsewhere, in a discussion of W. E. B. Du Bois on the study of black folk, Gordon restates an existential phenomenological conception of the anti-black world developed across his first several books: "Blacks here suffer the phobogenic reality posed by the spirit of racial seriousness. In effect, they more than symbolize or signify various social pathologies - they become them. In our anti-black world, blacks are pathology" (Gordon 2000: 87). This conception would seem to support to Moten's contention that even much radical black studies scholarship sustains the association of blackness with a certain sense of decay and thereby fortifies and extends the interlocutory life of widely accepted political common sense. In fact, it would seem that Gordon deepens the already problematic association to the level of identity. And yet, this is precisely what Gordon argues is the value and insight of Fanon: he fully accepts the definition of himself as pathological as it is imposed by a world that knows itself through that imposition, rather than remaining in a reactive stance that insists on the heterogeneity between a self and an imago originating in culture. Though it may appear counter-intuitive, or rather because it is counter-intuitive, this acceptance or affirmation is active; it is a willing or willingness, in other words, to pay whatever social costs accrue to being black, to inhabiting blackness, to living a black social life under the shadow of social death. This is not an accommodation to the dictates of the anti-black world. The affirmation of blackness, which is to say an affirmation of pathological being, is a refusal to distance oneself from blackness in a valorization of minor differences that bring one closer to health, life, or sociality. Fanon writes in the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*: "A Senegalese who learns Creole to pass for Antillean is a case of alienation. The Antilleans who make a mockery out of him are lacking in judgment" (Fanon 2008: 21). In a world structured by the twin axioms of white superiority and black inferiority, of white existence and black non-existence, a world structured by a negative categorical imperative - "above all, don't be black" (Gordon 1997: 63) - in this world, the zero degree of transformation is the turn toward blackness, a turn toward the shame, as it were, that "resides in the idea that 'I am thought of as less than human'" (Nyong'o 2002: 389). [22] In this we might create a transvaluation of pathology itself, something like an embrace of pathology without pathos. To speak of black social life *and* black social death, black social life *against* black social death, black social life as black social death, black social life in black social death - all of this is to find oneself in the midst of an argument that is also a profound agreement, an agreement that takes shape in (between) *meconnaissance* and (dis)belief. Black optimism is not the negation of the negation that is afro-pessimism, just as black social life does not negate black social death by vitalizing it.

A living death is as much a death as it is a living. Nothing in afro-pessimism suggests that there is no black (social) life, only that black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor - the modern world system. [23] Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space. This is agreed. That is to say, what Moten asserts against afro-pessimism is a point already affirmed by afro-pessimism, is, in fact, one of the most polemical dimensions of afro-pessimism as a project: namely, that black life is not social, or rather that black life is *lived* in social death. Double emphasis, on lived and on death. That's the whole point of the

enterprise at some level. It is all about the implications of this agreed upon point where arguments (should) begin, but they cannot (yet) proceed.

Wilderson's is an analysis of the law in its operation as "police power and racial prerogative both under and after slavery" (Wagner 2009: 243). So too is Moten's analysis, at least that just-less-than-half of the intellectual labor committed to the object of black studies as critique of (the anti-blackness of) Western civilization. But Moten is just that much more interested in how black social life steals away or escapes from the law, how it frustrates the police power and, in so doing, calls that very policing into being in the first place. The policing of black freedom, then, is aimed less at its dreaded prospect, apocalyptic rhetoric notwithstanding, than at its irreducible precedence. The logical and ontological priority of the unorthodox self-predicating activity of blackness, the "improvisatory exteriority" or "improvisational immanence" that blackness is, renders the law dependent upon what it polices. This is not the noble agency of resistance. It is a reticence or reluctance that we might not know if it were not pushing back, so long as we know that this pushing back is really a pushing forward. So, in this perverse sense, black social death is black social life. The object of black studies is the aim of black studies. The most radical negation of the anti-black world is the most radical affirmation of a blackened world. Afro-pessimism is "not but nothing other than" black optimism. [24]

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RESPONSE TO JARED SEXTON'S "ANTE-ANTI-BLACKNESS: AFTERTHOUGHTS"

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"Black memory is often at odds with state memory."

Michael Hanchard

*"The function of the curriculum is to structure what we call
'consciousness,' and therefore certain behaviors and attitudes."*

Sylvia Wynter, Proud/Flesh Interview with Sylvia Wynter

Jared Sexton's generative article "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts" addresses critical issues facing Black Studies today and he begins from the place of understanding that "blackness is theory itself, anti-blackness the resistance to theory." In my response I take up some of those threads and move in two hopefully related directions both of which are opened up by the work.

The first direction is one in which I briefly think through the state of black studies at my own university and in the second I think through Sexton's understanding of black social life in, under, and as black social death in relation to my ongoing engagement with the work of the Black Trinidadian Canadian lesbian novelist, poet, activist, theorist Dionne Brand.

For some people in and outside of the U. S. academy black studies is, still, the antithesis of theory, the antithesis of thinking. To juxtapose black and studies is to (still) join (in thinking) the un-thinkable. I am writing this response in the midst of ongoing struggles at my own university about whether, how, in what form to institute Africana Studies and whether that institutionalization will take the shape of an established major, a program with a major, or a department with a major. This struggle feels old but also strangely new and possibly generative in the kinds of questions it poses, the kinds of questions that might be asked, and the kinds of answers that might be given at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century. What is black studies (now)? What is the object of black studies (now)? What is the state of black studies (now)? Why (do you want) black studies (or Africana studies) (now)? What use black studies (now) in the current university? Should there (still) be some standalone thing called Africana Studies/Black Studies or should this work locate itself within something broadly conceived of as Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity? Or alternately should this work be located under some variety of a methodological critical analytical umbrella? Occupying the same time/space as the struggle over how the set of knowledges and practices gathered under Black or Africana Studies will be organized and not specific to my institutional residence is the struggle in and around and over what used to be or may still be called Women's Studies. In that instance of knowledge and curricular restructuring, sometimes "women" still appears in the title as in some form of "Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies," but often these interdisciplinary units are now called some form of Gender Studies or Gender and Sexuality studies. My point here is not so much to lament that change (though we might want to) as to ask why Women's Studies and, in particular, the *word* women embraced so belatedly are now turned away from so quickly in the name of something else under which "women" can be one category of what is thought? In other words, at the very least this change and these struggles signal that rather than possibly being seen as generative theoretically capacious terms by those who would locate their scholarship and teaching there, rather than being centers from and through which one can understand the workings

of power and the worlds we inhabit and are riven and inhabited by, it is imagined (now) that much or most can't be thought, theorized, or imagined under the sign of Women or Black (or Africana).

That tension is evident in the series of questions that Sexton asks and that he identifies as arising out of his research, his institutional context, and the undergraduate and graduate courses that he teaches. Questions that: "though they have been around for some time now, remain relatively young in the historic instance: Are there multiple forms or species of racism or simply variations of a fundamental structure? If it is the latter, what provides the model or matrix (colonialism, slavery, anti-Semitism)? Or is racism, rather, a singular history of violent conjunctures? Can anti-racist politics be approached in ways that denaturalize the color line, retain the specificities of discrepant histories of racialization, and think through their relational formation?" I add two additional questions that arise out of my own institutional context and that are at least one strand of the impetus behind sustained, multi-year student organizing for the various intellectual enterprises that constitute black studies: Will the fact of black studies ameliorate the quotidian experiences of terror in black lives lived in an anti-black world? And, if not, what will be the relationship between the two?

Sexton's remarks in "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts" are a response to and they predate and extend a conversation with a 2006 symposium he organized at University of California, Irvine called *Black Thought in the Age of Terror*. This work continues his ongoing, rigorous conversation and engagement with the works of Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, Hortense Spillers, Lewis Gordon, Frank Wilderson II, David Marriott and others in the field of black studies and, especially and in particular, with their study of the ongoing effects of slavery, its 'afterlife' (Hartman 2007). In laying out the tensions between "afro-pessimism" and "black optimism," Sexton is thinking the afterlife of slavery across the fields of cultural studies and comparative race and ethnic studies alongside the struggle that might seem to be internal to the field of black studies. He "wagers" (the ante) "that the details of what might seem at first to be a highly technical dispute in a small corner of the American academy will reveal themselves to be illuminating comments on the guiding assumptions and operative terms of the field of black studies particularly and the range of cultural studies more generally, both in and beyond the United States" (Sexton "Ante-Anti"). That is, he wagers that really contending with the figure of the slave('s life and death) will shift foundationally what we presume to know about slavery and its extending and extensive worlds.

Sexton makes clear that the critical insistence on the existence of black social life would have to be contended with amidst claims on and claims of the continuing relevance and persistence of black social death and vice-versa. But as this work also makes clear the existence of black social life in all of its modalities does not alter the fact of black social death. That black life is not recognized as life (or life lived) on the order of other lives. (This articulation is adjacent to Sylvia Wynter's theorizing in relation to both "race" and "gender" as "genre" which is another way to speak about the human (non black) and the anti-human (black) (See Wynter ProudFlesh, 2003).

What, then, is the relationship of the *ante* to anti-blackness: is it one of time (priority) or position (before or in front of), a wager, a demand to pay (up) or a marker of the stakes, the risk, the cost (and benefits) of anti-blackness? All of the above? The both/and instead of the either/or? It seems to me that it is the both-ness or perhaps the all-ness of those relationships that is the pivot (the copula) at the heart of Sexton's Ante-Anti-Blackness. The hyphens mark a not irresolvable distinction and they are a holding at bay, a horizontalization of relations, a holding on to, *and* a setting out of the question (of indisputable black suffering and the straining against it) that is the "agreed upon point where arguments (should) begin, but they cannot (yet) proceed" (Sexton "Ante-Anti"). And it is this tremendous capacity to think together, to draw out the often overlooked and passed over, to hold in tension, and then to advance a careful and ethical argument that I find so very useful and necessary about

Sexton's work. His work in this and other articles, as well as in *Amalgamation Schemes*, has opened up and made possible certain spaces for and lines of re/thinking in and in relation to my own work. It is work that insistently speaks what is being constituted as the unspeakable and enacts an **ethical embrace of what is constituted as (affirmatively) unembraceable**.

The Door and the ontology of blackness

"I think it [*A Map to the Door of No Return*] asks a fundamental question, which is not just a question for me or for Africans in the Diaspora, *but the question of being. How existence is constructed for you.*"

Dionne Brand interview with Maya Mavjee. "Opening the Door: An Interview with Dionne Brand" (emphasis mine).

As I think about Jared Sexton's work and what his intensive line of theorizing of anti/blackness opens up for me I turn back to Dionne Brand and, in particular, to her 2001 work *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. At the center of that work, Brand's meditation on the black body and questions of belonging and her understanding that "the frame of the doorway is the only space of true existence" (18), is a desire to account for the no/place, power, vulnerability, and the complex materiality of the body raced as black. It is a desire produced in the wake of the door of no return, that "collective phrase for the places, the ports, where slaves were taken to be brought to the Americas" (Mavjee "An Interview with Dionne Brand," 2001). *A Map to the Door* begins with "A Circumstantial Account of a State of Things," as it records the narrator's attempt to reckon with a series of circumstances and silences historical and personal that stand in the place of a record of how she has come to be and live in the place she is—Guayaguayare, Trinidad. At thirteen years old, the narrator tries to will her grandfather into remembering what he cannot remember and what he refuses to lie about—the name of the "people they came from." Instead of a name that would stand in for an account, the adolescent Brand encounters a lacuna and what is unnamed and unremembered signifies "a tear in the world," and "a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being" that is nevertheless productive of new modes of (not) being and (not) seeing (Brand 2001, 5). For Brand "the door of no return is on her retina" as an optic that guides her way of seeing, understanding, and accounting for her place in the world (Brand 2001, 89).

The door signifies the historical moment which colours all moments in the Diaspora. It accounts for the ways we observe and are observed as people, whether it's through the lens of social injustice or the lens of human accomplishments. The door exists as an absence. A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our body makes somehow gestures toward this door. What interests me primarily is probing the Door of No Return as consciousness. The door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora. Black experience in any modern city or town in the Americas is a haunting. One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history precedes. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives. Where one stands in a society seems always related to this historical experience. Where one can be observed is relative to that history. All human effort seems to emanate from this door. How do I know this? Only by self-observation, only by looking. Only by feeling. Only by being a part, sitting in the room with history (Dionne Brand 2001, 24-25).

When Brand writes this she locates the real and mythic door of no return as an optic and a haunting that continues to construct and position black people in the "new world." For Brand that un/known door is the frame that produces black bodies as signifiers of enslavement and its (unseeable) excesses; it is the beginning, the ontology, of the black. It is the ground that

positions black bodies to bear the burden of that signification, and that positions some black people to know and embrace it. This is, Brand's work powerfully exemplifies Sexton's extension of Gordon's reading of Fanon's acceptance of himself defined as pathological "by a world that knows itself through that imposition." An acceptance that "though it may appear counter-intuitive, or rather because it is counter-intuitive, ... is active; it is a willing or willingness, in other words, to pay whatever social costs accrue to being black, to inhabiting blackness, to living a black social life under the shadow of social death. This is not an accommodation to the dictates of the anti-black world. The affirmation of blackness, which is to say an affirmation of pathological being, is a refusal to distance oneself from blackness in a valorization of minor differences that bring one closer to **health, life, or sociality**" (Sexton "Ante-Anti").

Put another way, this is the modality in which Brand's works work so powerfully: the modality of exploring the various and varied black lives lived under occupation, the modality of black (social) life lived in, as, under, in spite of black (social) death. I read Brand alongside Sexton as mapping and creating a language for thinking, for articulating black (social) life lived alongside, under, and in the midst of the ordinary and extraordinary terror of enforced black social death.

Brand's work reaches toward a language of longing but not belonging, toward a language that expresses what it is to be subjected and to live through subjection. And part of the reason that I've returned to Brand again and again and to the body of Sexton's work is because of her, their, ability to stand looking at the door and to build a language that, despite the rewards and enticements to do otherwise, refuses to refuse blackness, that embraces "without pathos" that which is constructed and defined as pathology (Sexton "Ante-Anti").

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INTRODUCTION: MOBILISATIONS, INTERVENTIONS, AND CULTURAL POLICY

Emma Dowling - Ethics, Governance, and Accountability - Queen Mary, University of London

The relationship between political and social activism and the University has been repeatedly problematised. Posed in terms of a division between the 'scholar' and the 'activist', a division that often runs through the very social experience of subjects engaged in these endeavours, there have been multiple scholar-activist attempts to explode these categories and/or 'blur' the boundary between knowledge production within the University and knowledge production outside of its boundaries. This has been a double movement that has sought a confluence as well as a troubling of the categories of so-called 'theory' and 'practice.' The proliferation of scholarly work about, for and with social movements continues to pose the question of how to transgress the scholar-activist impasse in ways that overcome the frustrations encountered in the cul-de-sac of reified categories and identities and the possibilities of a post-disciplined world. This research thread is situated at this nexus, seeking an engagement with the political questions of knowledge production in ways that are relevant to social movement(s) and to processes of social change more broadly.

Notably, social movements are themselves entities whose own boundaries and definitions are blurred or hazy at best; the blurred line between research and action also derives and is related to the multiple and blurred identities of those seeking to engage movements as researchers and activists themselves. This multiplicity of subject positions and knowledges evokes the image of a network of knowledge production. Forms of networked 'horizontal' - not to say lateral - organising have been of interest to scholars and activists making the connections between the multiplicities of struggling subjects & communities, campaigns & organisations, at local, national and transnational levels. Yet, there is still work to be done in understanding the possibilities for the cross-pollination of ideas and interventions, and the openings for transformative praxis. Epistemologically engaging and traversing these networks raises key methodological questions as well.

The commodity form chases us from one site of production or struggle to the next and privatisation has and continues to discipline knowledge production in specific ways. The University, the so-called 'public sphere', art & culture, and indeed social change activism render productive for capital the creative capacities and the struggles of living labour. Inquiring into the political economy of these processes, this research thread asks what disciplining effects such attempts have and how epistemologies of social change are reconfigured and struggled against in the exploitation of labour. In the contemporary University in countries such as the UK, an interest in militant or co-research encounters an increased demand for university departments to demonstrate the 'impact' of their research and its connections to practice. There is potential in this encounter if new possibilities for intervention and for building collective power/knowledge can be prised open. At the same time, it can also lead to new rounds of co-optation and pacification of knowledge production. Recent times have also seen a growing interest in the artist as researcher and research-led art as well as a renewed discussion on the intersections between art, culture and politics. As social subjects - whether our activities take place primarily in one cultural universe or another, whether this is the (post-)public sphere, the University, a gallery, or whether as part of a social movement campaign - our research must be critically approached precisely in how it is embedded within the

multiple networks of social relations in which we exist. A methodology that takes this seriously must necessarily depart from an understanding that we are *always already* involved and located within the social processes we research, through direct involvement, or by virtue of existing in a social relationship to the research subject because our subject positions always impact upon how we interpret the world we live and research in. This research thread looks at the problems and proposals developed by movements and others as vital processes of knowledge production themselves, and argues for forms of research and writing that make the experience of positionality not a point of arrival, but a point of departure. Such an approach proposes an openness to change through precisely the encounters from which the research emerges, interrogating the possibilities of new connections and involving communities at the level of their self-organisation and self-representation, yet not fearful of disjuncture or of conflict.

The contributions of 'non-state' and 'civil society' actors along the supposed smooth plane of governance, are recognised more and more in the policy process. Yet, the question of policy as a terrain of struggle, and the power differentials that structure the policy process raise important questions about the possibilities for achieving emancipatory social and political transformation. Critical investigations often seek to uncover how the status quo of power is materially secured and reproduced, as well as rendered objective, neutral or natural, i.e. legitimised. However, whilst the critique of power in all its facets and manifestations is important and useful, if it is not analysed in conjunction with the active role that the subjects of power play, it renders them - whether inadvertently or not - absent and/or passive. There have of course also been many studies of resistance and of social movements. The kind of knowledge that is produced with an attention to resistance is able to address the productive role that these confrontational forces have, thereby unearthing the active subjects of resistance in the context of their material practices of invention and their relationship to policy. Our understanding of policy is informed not by the field of policy studies, strictly understood, but more precisely as a cultural-political field in which policies are not simply effected by the legal and political entities of the traditionally 'political', but also the sites of struggle over the meanings, norms and values that shape the cultural and social terrains.

There are three contributions to the research thread on *Mobilisations, Interventions and Cultural Policy* in this issue. *Urban Interventions* by Alexander Dellantonio, *Postcool* by Francesco Salvini, and *nanopolitics* by the nanopolitics group. *Urban Interventions* is a series of collages by Alexander Dellantonio that take the urban terrain with its rapid changes as the matrix of inquiry, presenting the artists reflections on the city. The strong colours used by the artist echo the city's images, places, people and situations and tattered billboard posters and manifestos torn off the buildings the militants fly-posted them on are reassembled to show the city and its inhabitants in movement. Dellantonio appropriates parts of the city and seeks to return them to the spectator. In so doing, these works not only engage the urban terrain as a space of politics, they also raise questions about mediation in the context of the current crisis of political representation that is being expressed by movements across the world, whether for example in Tahrir or Syntagma Square, at Occupy Wall Street or during the public sector strikes in the UK. Gavin Grindon and Begum Özden Firat provide commentaries on the *Urban Interventions* series, offering their reflections on Dellantonio's work. In the text *Postcool*, Francesco Salvini asks what it means to translate the categories of postcolonial thought in the practices of organisation of a subaltern neighbourhood trapped in the hurricane of valorisation and abstraction of urban space. Salvini presents an analysis of what he calls an 'audio-visual inquiry' conducted by a collective of political activists organising in the Raval in Barcelona. The laboratory of Postcool sought to find ways to learn about the subaltern histories of the Raval that are made invisible. Salvini discusses the ways in which the collective investigated how these subaltern histories of the Raval inscribe themselves in the urban design of the city in their relevance for organising against gentrification in the context

of postcolonial capitalism. A commentary on Salvini's analysis of the audi-visual inquiry of *Postcool* is provided by Sandro Mezzadra. The final text originates from a London-based collective, the nanopolitics group. The nanopolitics group formed around a desire to think politics with and through the body, organising movement-, theatre- and somatic based workshops and discussions. Using the term 'nanopolitics' to describe a political engagement that is attentive to the body, the nanopolitics group engage in a first reflection about their project in the text that appears here. They pose a series of questions that emerged from the project and engage in a collective reflection on their work with the body and movement, making a first foray into theorising their practice and its relevance.

All of the contributions engage the themes of this research thread on *Mobilisations, Interventions and Cultural Policy* in their own specific ways. Where Dellantonio is concerned with reassembling the remnants of different commercial and political interventions into urban space to articulate movement and encounter in the city, Salvini offers us a reflection of his group's quest to find an appropriate form of political practice as both mobilisation of, and intervention into, the urban space. Both pieces speak to the way in which this research thread aims to problematise the abstractions of cultural policy, reframing attention to the sites of struggle over the meanings, norms and values that shape the cultural and social terrains. The nanopolitics group shifts our attention to the body and its affective dimensions. Their text offers the body as a site traversed by the concerns of this research thread. There are four themes that weave their way through the three contributions. First, there is concern with intervention – intervention into the politics and practices of social movements and intervention into the academy and its traditions of knowledge production. Second, each text is situated firmly within a recognition and appreciation of social movements as knowledge producers. Third, all three contributions are unequivocally located in an urban context and the contemporary condition of inhabiting the city. Finally, what emerges from each reflection is a commitment to militant research and practice, as one that keeps ever-present an awareness of the relationship of research to existing material social relations of power and a commitment to confronting and transforming these very relations.

The curators of Lateral's research thread on *Mobilisations, Interventions and Cultural Policy* are Emma Dowling, Michal Osterweil, Manuela Bojadzijev and Erika Biddle. The contributions to this issue were curated and edited by Emma Dowling. Contact: lateralmobilisations@gmail.com.

INTERVENZIONE URBANE

Alexander Dellantonio

URBAN INTERVENTIONS



This piece is realised on canvas with a background of manifestos and political flyers covered with applications of clear blue and yellow colour, as well as tags by several graffiti artists. It was created with a street near the University in the centre of Florence (Italy) in mind, where the walls are painted on by street artists, where commentary on the most recent political issues and 'the movement' are sprayed on the walls and manifestos are fly-posted by the different political persuasions in a war against hostile authorities that spend their time ripping off manifestos and covering up the texts and paintings. In this picture, the colour wins back space from behind the monochromatic 'white-washing' of the authorities, so that the manifestos can appear once again.

Questo pezzo è realizzato su tela con sfondo di manifesti e volantini politici poi elaborati con applicazioni di colore azzurro e giallo. In seguito sono state apposte firme di "Writers" dagli stessi. E' stato creato pensando a una delle strade del centro di Firenze vicino all'università. Là vengono fatte scritte a bomboletta sui più recenti fatti del movimento e della politica, affissi manifesti di tutti gli schieramenti politici e studenteschi e pitturati i muri dagli "Street Artists" in una guerra con le autorità che ostinate continuano a cancellare e ripulire quei muri. In questa immagine il colore torna a farsi spazio da dietro le cancellature facendo riemergere scritte e manifesti.

COMMENTARY

Gavin Grindon - Visual and Material Culture - Kingston University

Though this first 'intervention' (though it is more an extraction) evokes the busy space of the street only to move it onto canvas, its approach is quite distinct both from the mid-century affichiste aesthetic of Dufren , Hains or Villeg , and from the common street-art aesthetics

INTERVENZIONE URBANE

Alexander Dellantonio

URBAN INTERVENTIONS



The composition reads: BIG BANG / market crisis / infinite war / borders / fears / national interests / the feeling that the government is not able to face the recession advances / Individuals are at risk in the same way as firms worth millions of Euros / that shark called the 'upper class' will break apart / the corporations of the world fall with Wall Street as the stock exchange strikes / liquidity crisis / wage freeze / country in ruin / revolting employees / the weak and the poor/ attacking/ revolution / square meetings / actions / fire and sword / endless meetings / civil war/ is the price of peace / political struggle for organisation / the weapon to destroy / united / the war / for a classless and borderless society.

La composizione recita: BIG BANG / Crisi dei mercati / La guerra infinita / Confini / Paure / Interessi nazionali / Si fa strada la sensazione che il governo non sia in grado di fronteggiare la recessione / Rischiano privati /e altrettanto / Società da / milioni di euro / Quel pesceccane chiamat / 1° Classe / si spaccherà / Le / Aziende / del mondo / con / Wall / Street / cadono sotto i colpi di Borsa / Crisi di liquidità / Stop ai salari / Paese allo sfascio/ Lavoratori dipendenti/ in rivolta/ Deboli e poveri / all'assalto Rivoluzione / Appuntamenti in piazza/ Azioni/ a ferro e fuoco/ Riunioni infinite / La guerra / civile / E' il prezzo della pace / La lotta politica per l'organizzazione un'arma per distruggere Uniti / la guerra Per / una / società / senza / classi / né / frontiere.



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Alexander Dellantonio



This work is realised on canvas with the remains of tattered manifestos that have been molten together with glue. The strips of paper are from walls in Bologna and Florence. The piece reveals the elements that determine its structure – the composition of the paper strips and the colours that are used provide the balance between colours and images. Anyone can see whatever they want to in this image. Yet, what is interesting is that it is possible to find so much stuff on the walls and in the streets that can be used for art without having to spend a penny. One can simply reuse materials that others have discarded as junk. In this case, instead of putting something into the street, you take from the street the materials with which you then give back to society in the form of art.

Questa opera è stata realizzata su tela con soli strappi di manifesti poi incollati tra di loro. I manifesti provengono dai muri delle città di Bologna e Firenze. Ognuno in quest'immagine può vedere cosa desidera anche se sono presenti alcuni elementi che ne determinano la struttura. Gli strappi di manifesti non sono messi a caso, sono il risultato del bilanciamento tra colori e immagini. La cosa interessante però è che si può recuperare dalla strada molto materiale per la creazione artistica senza spendere un penny, riutilizzando qualcosa che gli altri reputavano spazzatura o degrado. In questo caso al posto di mettere nella strada, ad esempio pitturando su un muro di dominio pubblico, si prende dalla strada per ridarlo alla società in forma di arte.

COMMENTARY

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RESPONSE BY
Gavin Grindon

Here, coloured strips of manifestos are applied to an old commercial billboard poster. The lines of the manifestos enable the colours to converge into geometrical figures, mostly cubes. This creates a kind of minimalist landscape that the woman on the left-hand side seems to be claiming for herself in her appreciation of the street art.

Per questa immagine è stato utilizzato un vecchio cartellone pubblicitario unito a strappi di manifesti lacerati. I colori e le linee riconoscibili su ciò che resta del manifesto vengono fatte convergere in modo da creare figure geometriche, cubi in particolare, formando un panorama minimalista che la donna sembra reclamare, con uno sguardo di simpatia per l'arte di strada.



INTERVENZIONE URBANE

Alexander Dellantonio

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Gavin Grindon - Visual and Material Culture - Kingston University

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Alexander Dellantonio

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An advertisement for a theatre production about urban Affichistes inspired this image of two Affichistes who walk the streets decorating walls with strips of tattered manifestos, creating beautiful works of art that are urban and non-conforming. The city lives off all the new ideas that emerge from these moments, ideas that often completely upset the logical sense of the things. The idea of the Affichiste has existed since the 1960s, when a group of artists calling themselves Affichistes emerged in France, Germany, and Italy. Their principal exponents were Jacques Villeglé, Raymond Hains and Mimmo Rotella.

Il manifesto di un'opera teatrale sugli attaccinatori di manifesti, ha fatto nascere l'idea che tali due individui andassero ad attaccinare pezzi strappati di manifesti creando splendide opere d'arte dal gusto urbano e non conforme. La città vive di tutte le idee nuove che ogni giorno nascono al suo interno e spesso tali idee finiscono per stravolgere totalmente il senso delle cose. E' storicamente esistita dagli anni sessanta una corrente artistica chiamata "Affichistes" tra Francia, Germania e Italia i quali esponenti principali sono stati Jacques Villeglé, Raymond Hains e Mimmo Rotella.

RESPONSE BY
Begüm Özden Tural

COMMENTARY

Gavin Grindon - Visual and Material Culture - Kingston University

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Lettera 1

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Alexander Dellantonio

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This artwork is realised on a piece of plywood using the collage technique. It is incredible how one single sheet of newspaper can – almost casually – make sense of so many different concepts like civil war, revolution, demonstration, politics, money, corruption, poverty and so forth. All these terms adjusted in their consequential and temporal dispositions give a very different view on the stories the media tells, making it possible to extract interesting scenarios of rebellion, of organisation and protest, as well as revolutionary outbreaks from liberal democracy. Let's not forget that we would have every reason to do this in our own contexts as well.

Quest'opera è stata realizzata con la tecnica del collage su una lastra di compensato. E' incredibile come un solo giornale quotidiano, preso a caso, contenga tanti termini come, guerra civile, rivoluzione, manifestazioni, politica, soldi, corruzione, povertà, etc. Tutti questi termini, ordinati secondo la loro giusta disposizione temporale danno una visione molto diversa da quella proposta dai media, si può in tal modo estrarne interessanti scenari di ribellione, di organizzazione politica e di piazza, come anche di travisamento rivoluzionario della democrazia. Ricordiamoci che avremmo tutte le buone ragioni dalla nostra per agire in tal modo all'interno del nostro contesto sociale e politico.

RESPONSE BY
Begüm Özden Tirit



COMMENTARY

Gavin Grindon - Visual and Material Culture - Kingston University

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RESPONSE BY
Gavin Grindon



RESPONSE BY
Begüm Özden Firat



COMMENTARY

Gavin Grindon - Visual and Material Culture - Kingston University

Though this first 'intervention' (though it is more an extraction) evokes the busy space of the street only to move it onto canvas, its approach is quite distinct both from the mid-century affichiste aesthetic of Dufrêne, Hains or Villeglé, and from the common street-art aesthetics that echo them. They had ripped posters from walls to create a 'new realist' aesthetic of spatial collage which rearranged strips of barely-legible fragments of everyday life, placing the vitality of these quickly torn strips and the competing bold designs and bright colours of different advertisements on the inside walls of the gallery. But despite its ambiguities, this aesthetic, reiterated by street artists across gentrifying neighbourhoods from Brooklyn to Hackney, has come to evoke not a simple 'new' urban vitality but a spectatorial and 'autonomous' (and, inevitably, speculative and opportunist) attitude to urban poverty and material decay as 'picturesque.' Their new realism long since absorbed by what Fisher (2010) has termed a 'capitalist realism.'

Elsewhere, Dellantonio evokes this historical movement in playful terms with a neo-affichiste montage. In two pieces, the aesthetic of affichisme is used not as an intervention into the matter and materiality of urban printmaking, but as a signifier of a particular artistic practice, within a larger montage that constructs a narrative around it. In one, against a bright blue sky background, a female figure from what seems a rather dated advertisement shouts cheerfully, in what in this context seems a Western commodified and domestic response to Rodchenko's famous 1924 publishing house advertisement depicting Lilya Brik shouting. But now rather than advertising revolutionary textbooks, or washing powder, her shouted bubble caption, "now even better!" doesn't interpellate us as consumer or revolutionary subject but ironically leads our eye only to a an indiscernable rough, angry affichiste mess of torn colours which jar with this bright cheerful scene. Rather than a sincere announcement of an unproblematic renewed affichiste vitalism, it seems a brute statement of impossibility. Elsewhere, the point is pressed home, as a poster advertising a theatre production about two street artists finds itself placed on a canvas, but now the extradiagetic visual play of the original poster - which depicts the fictional pair putting up a poster which actually advertises the show they are in - is undone. They and their poster-brush extending across the piece remain intact, but the poster they are putting up is impossibly already torn and layered by other posters before it is even affixed. And while this affichiste signifier sits within this image below it to create a new playful narrative meaning, it also begins to break outside of the top edges of the frame of this original image, asserting itself as the dominant outer conceptual frame. In each case these more

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narrative constructions assert the historical distance between this aesthetic and its present uses.

Returning to the first image, it is now not affichistes or competing advertisers, but council employees – who do not rip the posters or replace them with other bigger posters, but simply paint over this heteroglossic space in monochrome blocks of colour, a simple closure of debate and representation which echoes the close control of the media in Berlusconi's Italy. Dellantonio's move from political flyers and street-posters to canvas doesn't invoke 'the street' in celebratory fashion as an abstract ideal of political participation, as it often has been for artists and writers since '68, but indicates a specific, historical space, a street near the university in Florence used for wheatpasting popular political posters, flyers and announcements, often graffiti'd with critical or supportive responses. This specificity manifests itself not only in the minimal pictorial content, but in the large areas of detailed text left visible. In her essay, 'concrete needs no metaphor,' Feigenbaum (2010: 120) argues that fences, so often turned into makeshift collective canvases in protest situations, do not function simply as a pictorial or discursive surface, however heteroglossic. Instead, these surfaces affect the bodies of those who write, paste or attach things to them, in a moment of 'communicative struggle.' Such moments of struggle are micropolitical, often invisible. Dellantonio's piece recalls public space in these terms, not the street as ideal public sphere or open democratic space so much as a marginal and ephemeral location of struggle, in which the authorities simply remove or bluntly paint out heteroglossic debate. In the next piece in the series, this process is evoked in more tragic terms. The canvas is composed of fragments of manifestos pasted in the streets of Bologna and Florence, but torn and reposted without text, as abstract shapes and colours, or fragments of images, no longer legible as anything but vague impressions, and smeared and spattered with rust or mud. Political participation here – in close attention to the wall – is not heroic but contingent, vulnerable and ephemeral. In the first piece, the informal frame of rough oblong squares of colour impinging on the text suggest casual brushstrokes, as if what we can read is momentarily to be swallowed by the next movement of the brush wielded by a council employee. Or, perhaps now finding itself on canvas in the more reflective, and fantastical, institutional space of art, we might imagine an alternative movement in which, spectre-like, the claims, hopes and promises of the movement have pushed their way through repression into visibility. While evoking this moment in which the materials of social movements come to haunt public space and are extinguished, the canvas itself functions as an echo of or memorial to this moment of posters and flyers on this wall, both specific and local yet common to the experience and growth processes of movements across the urban West.

In two other pieces, Dellantonio presents a similarly fantastical visual act of sabotage, in which the text of a newspaper is cut up and rearranged into a poetic ransom note which releases the submerged histories held captive within the reductive hegemonic narratives of the mass press, through which protest and social movement action events are normally represented. The same words burst forth in a new order, a return of the repressed in a fantasy of revolutionary organisation, "that shark called first class will break apart/ the companies of the world with wall street fall at the strikes of the stock exchange... the weak and the poor/ attacking / revolution/ square meetings / actions/ fire and sword / endless meetings / civil war / is the price of peace."

Across these pieces, there is a focus on submerged narratives of organisation, on the work and relations whose material traces are lost soon after the event, left in barely-visible fragments either on the repainted walls or buried in the simplified repetitive narratives of the mass media. What is really interesting here is that this approach suggests a more intimate reflection than the most common representational strategies used in figuring social movement. In the first image, finally, there is no heroic moment of visibility, the street pictured as filled by a massed crowd pictured from an elevated height. Instead, there is text without people, and a focus on the small, hand-held materials of movements, in an earlier and usually far-less visible moment of invocation and organisation.

Feigenbaum, A. (2010): 'Concrete Needs No Metaphor: Globalized Fences as Sites of Political Struggle,' *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organisation*, 10:2, pp.119-133.

Fisher, M. (2012): *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* London: Zero Books, 2012.

[top](#)

Begüm Özden Firat - Sociology - Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul

The writing on the building number 3A reads: "BEWARE...STORAGE DOOR PLEASE...DO NOT PARK."

It is quite common in cities across Turkey for ordinary people to write such statements on the walls of buildings. By doing so, they communicate their requests, wishes, and sometimes their anger. What makes this one distinctive is the signature of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, sprayed below the text by another anonymous passerby. One can run into Atatürk's signature in different urban settings – schools, monuments, or hospitals – adorning

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his countless aphorisms which usually glorify the Turkish nation. Yet, never in the form of what we can call an 'urban intervention'. Here, I am not going to delve into a discussion of how acts of detournement, such as this one, gain political significance.

What interests me in this image in relation to Alexander Dellantonio's *Urban Interventions* series is that it clearly demonstrates that shared urban walls produce a sense of publicness through continuous acts of collage and decollage. Walls are contested and negotiated spaces of encounter where people communicate with each other - from their intimate feelings to agitational revolutionary slogans. This is why the powers that be want to take total control of urban space through the

implementation of laws and regulations and the development of techniques and technologies designed to shorten the life of such interventionist practices. After all, public space should be planned and regulated, and it should be orderly and safe.

Political and social movements must continually claim their presence in public space, if they ever are to be seen and heard. One of the main aims of dissident movements is to occupy public space and retrieve it from the Colonisation of capital and political authorities so as make it an open space for all. In this quest for emancipation, walls appear to be one of the sites of struggle where the confrontation takes the form of graffiti, stencils, stickers, murals, posters and the like. Yet, such inscriptions are always tainted by ephemerality. In order to counter their transient existence, activists deploy different tactics.

There is an almost forgotten tactic in the long history of flyposting. You break a couple of light bulbs, mix them with glue and then plaster your posters wherever you want them. Broken light bulbs make it difficult to remove the posters. The hope is that this practice can also deter the authorities from removing the posters. It seems like the new generation of activists and street artists have developed different strategies for prolonging their interventions, such as using durable chemicals as well as documenting them by taking photographs. The *Urban Interventions* series can be seen as yet another way of making street art endure.

The *Urban Interventions* series consist of collages of urban word- and image-scapes (posters, graffiti tags, newspapers, advertisements). The desire is to preserve the ephemeral by fixing whatever remains from the street on a manageable surface. We can read this act of preservation as a humble attempt to make sense of street politics and poetics, archiving the traces of what was once there. However, it seems to me that this urge to capture the potentially passing in such a manner misses the very politics of the street: a politics based on a constant struggle that produces alternative and unanticipated meanings. The writing on the building adorned with the signature of Ataturk is a good case in point for such struggles, where the concerns of the common clash with those of a public taboo. The everyday world confronts the official world and opens up a third level of understanding that offers an estranged vision of both of them. This clash between heterogeneous elements (and violently separated worlds-of life and arts, aesthetics and commodities) is indeed the basic tenet of the aesthetics and politics of the collage - from Braque to Dada all the way to the works of Martha Rosler and Barbara Kruger. In such works, a dialectic between the heterogeneous parts opens up the space of the 'interval', which is the realm of shock and provocation, and of thought. In *Urban Interventions*, it seems rather like the collage form produces a homogenous and cohesive unity between the assembled pieces (tags, manifestos, leaflets, newspaper cuttings and advertisements). The pieces suspend the act of confrontation so dear to the politics of collage in favour of representing the dissident's voice and visibility. Theodor Adorno once criticized 'committed art' for bleating what everyone is already saying or at least secretly wants to hear. This is why, for him, such art runs the risk of becoming an empty slogan and preaching the converted. In a similar vein, when we see the manifesto with the title "battaglia comunista" for example, our hearts may move a little faster, but it does not necessarily provoke us to think or act.

One must admit that there is something politically motivating about the *Urban Interventions* series, as it brings together bits and pieces of 'signs' of comrades in other parts of the world. It makes you feel like the movement is indeed everywhere. Yet, the series also shows us that we should try to find ways of making sense of our struggles beyond the limits of representation. Experimenting with creative ways of fabricating antagonisms on canvases is as revolutionary as producing them in the streets.

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What does it mean to translate the categories of postcolonial thought in the practices of organization of a subaltern neighborhood trapped in the hurricane of valorization and abstraction of urban space? Or better said, what does it mean to rethink radical forms of collective organization in the face of an attack of postcolonial capitalism on the urban life of a poor and derelict neighborhood? The Laboratory of 'Postcool' aimed to deal with the clash of these two questions in very practical terms. Here, the author, a member of the collective, recounts and problematizes the experience, situating it in the broader context of a reinvention of radical political practices in urban Europe.

In this article, I recount an experience that dealt with the question of organization in the context of postcolonial capitalism. An experience on the edge between knowledge and practice, theory and intervention, where the virtue we have been pursuing - understood as the Machiavellian ability of intervening in the display of reality to produce a fruitful political transformation (Negri 1999) - was to introduce our analytical endeavors into the dynamics of gentrification in our neighborhood, *the Raval*. It has been - and still is - an experience that intervened on a molecular level. That is, not on the level of transforming the political asset of reality as apparatus, but possibly affecting the micropolitics of the subjectivities that inhabit everyday life (Guattari 1984).

I focus on the ways in which a small group of militants affected one another and their environment. Indeed, almost all of the participants in The Laboratory were (and are) actively involved in grassroots political organizations in the Raval. The workshop allowed us to transform our own understanding of the situation we live in and to think about the ways in which we can intervene in it. This is what I will refer to as militancy.

The experience I address in this paper is a laboratory of audiovisual militant research in which I participated and that was informally termed *postcool*. Militant research is not only a committed analysis of the political relationships of exploitation of labor or in the urban space, but a problem-posing engagement with how capitalist relations affect the way in which we produce knowledge and the way in which our own production of knowledge can affect the political practices we enact against capitalist exploitation. Militant research is therefore a committed and collective production of common notions (common analytical tools and practices) for and by a political community, that allows for the production of knowledge useful for struggles (Malo 2004; cf. Borio et Al 2002, Conti et al 2004, Colectivo Situaciones 2003).

Postcool began in the summer of 2010 with the intention of tackling the question of political organization in the urban transformations affecting the everyday life in and around the Raval, Barcelona. We used three specific tools. These three tools encompassed the analytical categories found in the postcolonial debate, the technical practices of radical documentary filming, and our experience of the barrio as actively involved members of political organizations, militants. Our

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non enim est omnia as the adage has it: the Raval is the old Arab name for a neighborhood in the centre of Barcelona that means 'limit' or 'margin'. After being home to convents for centuries, it became the crucial territory of the first industrial revolution in Catalonia: factories, working class settlements, the harbor, and all kinds of formal and informal activities have shaped the streets of the Raval since the early 19th Century. Its new name, *Xino* emerged when the factories moved to the periphery of Barcelona (to the Poble Nou). The space of the Raval became a central point for brothels (that paid rent to the Church), poets, bohemians and poor people (who paid their bills working in the brothels), as well as sailors (who spent their salaries at the cabaret shows) (Genet 1964, Vallmitjana 2003).

The radical history of the Xino/Raval has been studied extensively (Villar 1996, Subtracts & Rios, 2005). It was a crucial site for resistance and organization against the Franco regime and constituted the core of counter-cultural and sexual freedom movements from the 1960s onwards. It is a place where migrants have congregated, from the rural urban exodus of the early 19th century to the current global movements of migration. Class struggle, popular and counter-culture - as cultures of opposition, sexuality and migration - are the intertwined ciphers of the non-conventional history of this neighborhood.

Considered an immoral space, the Xino was re-named Raval in the early 1980s in the discursive and material construction of an urban project of regeneration. The area was developed by the modern and civil socialist administration to 'democratize' the barrio after the dictatorship by avoiding its luxurious memory and going back to the preindustrial name. A rationalist and hygienizing strategy that followed the principles of *Hausmannization* (Benjamin, 1968) was an attempt to transform a derelict neighborhood into a "neighborhood for everybody". This could have been the slogan of the urban planner Oriole Buigas (the Council's Director of Urban Plans and Projects in Barcelona from 1980 to 1984) in his endeavors to reaffirm the bourgeois rationality of city planning in accordance with the Modernist Vocation of Barcelona and Catalonia (Resina, 2008). A model of urban development based on the 19th Century Catalan Utopia of the *First Metropolis* (Guallar, 2010) that aimed to regenerate the slums of the inner city and plan the rationalist urban area called the Eixample. A regeneration whose goal was no other than an "embellissement stratégique" [strategic beautification] (Benjamin, 1968:87),

The real aim of Hausmann's works was the securing of the city against civil war. [...] The breadth of the streets was to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets were to provide the shortest route between the barracks and the working-class areas.

The first project to open La Rambla del Raval is presented in the early 1850s, just after the February Revolution of Paris, when Cerda proposed his plan according to Hausmannian principles of urban planning (Magrinya 2009). "Why not transform Sarria [the rich neighborhood on the top of the hills] into a place where everybody can live? Why the Raval?", one of the participants in The Laboratory asked, recalling the debate of the 1980s on the (*strategic*) *beautification* of the Raval. And the battle is still ongoing: the building of museums, the opening of Ramblas (typical

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population according to different citizenship status, as well as fragmenting the access to social services, and implementing new laws on the use of urban space following the lead of New York City's 'zero tolerance' policies (Larraurri 2007). In the construction of a policed urban space (especially through controls and raids to identify undocumented people), fear and safety operate as tools that instate borders over the smooth space of the city as subjective perceptions, imposing the segmentation of life-worlds in the urban space. Undocumented migrants, informal workers, the urban poor, precarious populations, 'traditional' working classes, international bohemians, artists, tourists, civil servants (from police to social services) and real estate developers share the same urban space. Yet, as in the game produced by the *CounterMapping Queen Mary Collective*, their mobility is differentiated and limited according to their status.

At the same time, the material construction of a hegemonic discourse of development imposes a subaltern condition on this *barrio*. Safety, sanity, hygiene, middle class regeneration and gentrification are the spine of the modern social-democratic discourse that permitted the making of hierarchies amongst the knowledges and cultures composing the contemporary urban space, materially constructing the space in these terms by clearing working class housing blocks or by building new avenues for the Olympic Games. There is a clear contrast here between the clever discourses of the 'serious' museum or the patronizing words of 'generous' social services and the drunken cackles of dark nights or the malicious whispers in the clumsy streets.

This double process in which social life is first segmented and then hierarchized, permits the development of specific regimes for each labor market (and each life-world) in the urban space. The informal economies of leisure and tourism (sex, alcohol, drugs and so forth), the correlation between real estate speculation and cultural development (urban development, corruption and global investments in the creative city), or the developmental economies of social services and urban regeneration (welfare state, externalisation of social services, urban regeneration) are correlated spheres of social production.

Due to the separations and interconnections among these spheres, the possibility of maximizing profit depends upon the ability to impose an efficient border between the different labor markets, in turn adjusting the mode of exploitations to the specific conditions of each segmented labor market. Indeed, the governance of urban life is a mode of production where exploitation is based on the heterogeneity of status, and situated relationships of power between capital and labor (Boutang 1998): in this sense the prevarication of labor - as the individualisation of the labor market (Fumagalli 2000) - is part of this process of proliferation of borders in urban production together with the management of global classes (Ong 2006) or the fragmentation of the status of migrants (Stassen 2003). This is the translation of a colonial *dispositif* with which to govern labor in the postcolonial metropolis, here concretely: the Raval.

This double implementation (segmentation and hierachization) of the colonial *dispositif* is functional to the governance of "the constitutive heterogeneity of contemporary global capital" (Million 2009:88, cf. Mezzadra 2006). In other words, the possibility of valorizing urban life is based on the complex articulation of different paradigms of capitalist accumulation: the

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communities and independent galleries are included in a neoliberal valorization of the city that aims to brand Barcelona as a space of alternative culture in the emerging global competition of urban regions.

In the Raval, the counter-cultural, migrant and transgendered milieus of the 1970s are involved in a generalized process of self-entrepreneurialization that aims to valorize this cultural production on a global market of culture and art (Expositor et Al 2003, Deutsche & Ryan 1984). A normalization that proposes a fruitful commodification of these life worlds while at the same time attacking their autonomy by subordinating it to the rule of exchange value.

Those who refuse this entrepreneurialization and commodification have to struggle in at least two ways in order to survive: against the unscrupulousness violence of global capital and the pernicky bureaucratization of the cultural sphere.

Bodega Bohemia (closed in 1999) and other cabarets of homosexual and transsexual culture struggled in the first way mentioned above. Here, the kind of political culture that managed to scrape through Franco's regime has been unable to resist to the violence of urban regeneration (and real estate speculation) (Dolz 2000; Gual 2010). In the former, satire and transgression represented a dangerous attack to the legitimacy of the regime. In the latter, culture and innovation feed development but are expelled once they are not anymore competitive for the market.

The second way in which struggles have occurred was a struggle encountered by those counter-cultural and political spaces that were trying to avoid becoming enterprises and in so doing, ran up against the administrative policies of the Council. 'Use Planning' along with the redefinition of commercial duties in the late 1990s as well as the 'Civic Ordinance on Urban Behaviours' in 2005 limited the possibility of maintaining open those spaces not driven by a commercial logic by regulating a strict commercial regime of labor organization.

For many cultural associations accepting such a regime, it meant renouncing their traditional systems of cooperative (self-) management. This was the case with Ateneu Xino, one of the cultural spaces where a radical critique of the contemporary regeneration of Barcelona was forged. After twelve years of political organizing against the violence of urban dispossession (defined as *urban mobbing*) this space was foreclosed by the police in 2007 (interview with Manel Gonzalez - one of the organizer of the Ateneu Xino; Horta 2010, Taller VIU 2006).

We can recall here Lefebvre's understanding of the abstraction of urban space (1991). Concretely in the space of the Raval, this has meant a double take. First, a postcolonial regime of government has segmented and produced hierarchies along the plane of urban life; second, cognitive capitalism's mechanisms of codification have disciplined behaviours in order to valorize social cooperation. This shows clearly how the postcolonial mechanism (for which labor is abstracted by translating life-world into the global language of capital, cf. Chakrabarty 2000) and the neoliberal commodification of the social cooperation (that incorporates the general intellect into

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Chinese whispers or a laboratory of audiovisual militant inquiry in the Raval

This is the space where we have to organize! This is the enemy we have to face and the dynamics we have to contrast: the violent abstraction and expropriation of social life in urban space.

In this context, our attempt has been to engage with the complexity of the attack in an alliance of different actors in the neighborhood, constructing a common space in which to introduce categories, instruments and experiences that can help us struggle. After organizing a series of seminars on the right to the city in the social centre *Exit*, we realized that the format we were using represented a dead-end, because it closed down discussion by funnelling it into a rhetorical analysis of the dynamics of urban spaces.

This is why we wanted to build a new space, an original 'us' that involved people by sharing spaces of production, not just discussion. We wanted to talk about the crisis of representation and the silencing of our voices. The postcolonial categories were very useful in this attempt, but we needed to find tools to make this debate a dynamic production of alternative forms of expression. Tools with which we could both analyze and problematize. This was the only way - at least the only way we could see - that we could think the production of knowledge as a radical practice of organization.

When I refer to 'an original us', I think of the intertwining of different networks and communities that inhabit the neighborhood: older or newer migrants, students, researchers, street workers, transgender persons, and paupers. The group that comes together in The Laboratory proceeds from these different territories but never becomes a representation of the networks or communities (something that we probably secretly aimed at in the beginning).

There are reasons for this. Firstly, we proposed to different people that they should participate in a laboratory for the investigation of the postcolonial dimension of our everyday lives. The participants were primarily from the social centre *Exit*, the *Universidad Nomada*, an association of people in mortgage debt (*PAH*), an association for sex workers' rights (*Genera*), an association of street vendors (*Nomadas del Siglo XXI*), and members of the film-maker collective *Circes*. The collectives themselves did not consider this project their priority, which seems obvious when considered in the context of the immediate struggles these different collectives faced, whether this was the social centre up against the violence of the urban bureaucracy, the *PAH* fighting evictions and repossessions, or the *Genera* street workers and *Nomadas del Siglo XXI* who are having to deal with fines, detentions and expulsions on a daily basis.

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This uncomfortable position, in which everybody expresses collective voices but no one is representative of any collective, shows us something typical of the way in which militancy engages with the complex assemblage of heterogeneous modernity. No one represents anyone because no one is an integer (in the sense proposed by Chatterjee (2002), namely representing any organization, community or network). However, the space of The Laboratory becomes a *living composition among singular expressions* that refer, evoke and connect collectives, networks, and communities. The shared space on terms that are different to this urgency is not the articulation of a unified discourse but the production of common space as *encounter*.

On the other hand, inhabiting this uncomfortable position allowed for a gesture of displacement. Ten persons and one thousand identities with different cultural, sexual, economic and racialized backgrounds, overlapping and contrasting. What we had in common was the experience of The Laboratory as a transformative force for our way of being militants. What we shared was a *collective becoming* of militancy. A concrete learning process of how to produce organization in the Raval. In this sense it is important to stress that was not so much about understanding the difference between concepts but about how to put these to work together with memories, practices and tools of expression.

For example, we focussed on the difference between *history2* and *history1* as proposed by Chakrabarty (2000), or *histories* versus *History* as we termed it. We also focussed on the opposition between discourse and whispers and the heterogeneity of modernity that stemmed from our mapping of the sounds that inhabit the modern metropolis.

Borrowing from a practice of radical pedagogy used by the *ultrared.org* collective, we recorded the sounds of everyday life in different parts of our neighborhood and discussed the composition of the different experiences of sound that we had. The map that emerged charted a myriad of languages from all parts of the world and the different tones and roles of each tongue: the tourist guide, the migrants on the benches of the Raval, the whispering and the kisses of sex workers trying to convince their clients to linger with them, or the silence of the streets when the police drove through, and the noise of the building sites that conceals the voices of undocumented workers. The rumors in the *ouvre*, understood as the complex social process that produces the city everyday (Lefebvre 1991) appeared to us as "a measure of the distance between a typical site of collective discourse and an ideal seat of official truth - between the bazaar and the bungalow, so to say" (Guha, 1983:259), or, in our case, between the streets and the museum.

Following on from this sound mapping, a group of us presented the concept of rumor and discourse in Guha (cf. Barthes 1986) and Chakrabarty's critique of history (*ex supra*). Another group of us who had a background in audiovisual arts took charge of presenting documentaries or film excerpts that dealt with the problems we had identified in the sound mapping - not only (or not primarily) to analyze the contents of political documentaries and find an analytical narrative, but to discover and learn their techniques, along with the political consequences of using different tools as a mode of expression.

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viewer how to interpret the images she is watching, in contrast, an 'off-screen sound' accounts for something the viewer cannot see on the screen and that she can only imagine through the sounds she can hear. From there we built a discussion upon a similarity between this contrast in audiovisual language and the difference between the discourse of History and the whispers of histories.

Shot by shot, piece by piece, we constituted a *common speech* (Rossi-Landi, 1968) that emerged through our cooperative labor. In this common space, signifiers and signified worked according to a particular set of relationships, a hybrid *technology* where categories, techniques and experiences are mixed up and can work together. The labor we did, in other terms, produced an original *pragmatic* of language (Bakhtin 1993, Bazzanella 2005) where the links between signifier-signified were reconfigured in the relationship between postcolonial theory, audiovisual tools and experiences: linking rumor to off-screen sound, or the concept of *abstraction of space* to the specific policing of the Raval's street.

In order to move from debate to a process of production, we began to work on different questions. For this, we divided into two groups. One group worked on the category of labor, while the other (the group I participated in) started to work on housing rights and moved towards a broader engagement with the question of housing and the abstraction of space. How has the Raval changed? What happened to the inhabitants of the buildings that were wiped out? What is going to be built instead? We finished by focusing on a particular parcel of land that has been affected by the public works of a construction site for many years.

We began to look for stories that could tell us about the everyday dynamics of urban space before the process of gentrification destroyed it. On the one hand, we found the discourse of a 'coherent' modernity that aimed to hygienise and develop the neighborhood. On the other, looking for what social life inhabited this space, we could only find jokes, anecdotes, and little stories. Unreliable sources that talked with irony about the processes they experienced.

We moved into this gap of (un)reliability. The discourse of modernity is underwritten by recognized institutions as much as it is confirmed by architects, urban planners and criminologists. In the most of documentaries we watched through, the director would shot with a TV medium close up, in which the viewer can see the speaker's face and his/her hands, and is presented with some didactic descriptions of the academic qualifications of the interviewees. This is supposed to reassure the viewer of the truth value of the statements in the documentary. On the other end of the spectrum, rumors and whispers were almost never represented and, whenever they were, it was to make evident the imprecision of this kind of knowledge, the voices of the victims of ignorance (Guha, 1983). So we decided to start looking at these contrasts and use the whispers as sources of alternative truths against the homogeneous discourse of modernity.

In order to do this, we decided to search for the imaginary stories inhabiting a destroyed block of flats on Carrer d'En Robador, the most derelict of the streets on the side of the construction site. For us, the question of imagination and truth was compelling. Should we respect an

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left simply to the cinematic truth of images. Then we let the night come and hold the voices from our interviews, reverting the role of the voice-off and collecting the rumors and the ghosts proliferating in the *barrio*. While our camera lingered on the public works of the construction site for the new Centre for Cinema of Catalonia - visual expression of the need for culture and beauty in the neighborhood - we used interviews to revert the function of voice-over. From the screen, the cultures that once inhabited this space started to occupy the sound space of the movie. They were searching for their own precarious voices to tell their different stories about modernity.

In the interviews and in the editing of the film, the critique of the homogeneous representation of modernity became entangled with the way we tried to contest and deconstruct the space, the way we chose to shoot or the stories we decided to stage. The political and technical discussions involved vivid translations of concepts into an optical point of view, as well as the attempts to use concepts, techniques and experiences as different parts of the same machine. Moving knowledge from one territory to another allowed each of us to engage with concepts or techniques from different positions and therefore challenged the power relations due to the knowledge differentials within the group.

Furthermore, this method gave us a concrete product to work with in the moment we moved out of The Laboratory. However, a problem emerged (or better is emerging) here: we realised that we had to turn the tension between product and process upside down. Now that the films are almost finished, we are engaged in discussing the process of distribution. How can we transform this distribution into a tool of political organization? If we are thinking *distribution* as a process through which to discuss the possibilities of *proliferating* political practices, concepts, experiences or languages, it would be reductive to fix our attention just on the two films we are making, not least because they are not necessarily excellent pieces of art.

Distribution and proliferation

If we want The Laboratory to be a space for the discussion of forms of organizing and not just 'urban problems', we need to present the product as a process, and to use *distribution* itself as part of this process of political organization. For example, we want to use the films (and the debates we had during the production) to question the position of new artists that inhabit the

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In a workshop with activist groups, we could use different materials: we could listen to the recordings of some of the interviews and read excerpts of the transcripts in order to steer the discussion towards the limits and the possibilities of our own practices. A broader range of materials allows us to move beyond a linear representation of our products and use the *products* as stepping-stones as we move forward, thereby investigating the "decisive difference between merely transmitting the apparatus of production and transforming it." (Benjamin 1970).

Yet thinking about how to generalise access and how to use distribution as a step forward in the process of production made us move from the DVD to a GPL *drupal* platform where we could embed public virtual spaces such as pad.ma or diaspora* as a way of thinking the author as producer in the network society (Benjamin 1970, Castells 1996) and specifically within the techno-political assets we are immersed in today.

The only way to make this production politically useful is to master the competencies in the process of intellectual production which, according to the bourgeois notion, constitutes their hierarchy; and more exactly, the barriers which were erected to separate the skills of both productive forces must be simultaneously broken down. When he experiences his solidarity with the proletariat, the author as producer also experiences directly a solidarity with certain other producers in whom earlier he was not much interested. (Benjamin 1970:92)

In this sense, investigating the revolutionary tendency of a website would mean to trespass the borders between the different spheres of production involved in *distribution*.

Open discussions in the streets or on the web would allow us to connect the materials in a transversal way: interviews, films and photos, as well as the recording of discussions, of seminars, the fragments of books and films we used to imagine our own work. The discussions could be considered to make up a complex machinic space in which partial products become the first step of a new process. Also it would enable us to keep track of discussions and interlink the real and the virtual. This also includes blogging and recording seminars, using forums, piratepad.org and comments to trigger *real* discussions during workshops, and reporting - in real time - the discussions happening in the physical encounters on the Internet.

This constitutes not only a process of reflection on what we have done, it is also a process of organization, because it would allow us to share techniques, to build alliances, and to envisage possible campaigns and to experiment with new ways of doing politics. This process of proliferation could allow us to trigger an autonomous accumulation of knowledges: in the discussions, debates or web forum, the interventions would no longer be contingent on or subordinated to the voice of the author, but instead they would be part of a collective production of critique on how the violence of capital is affecting our lives (Foucault 1997). In so doing, the voices of the listeners would modify The Laboratory of *postcool* itself.

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A second set of problems emerges when we reflect upon how to institute a *valorization* of this laboratory for the organization of struggles. For example, organizing a session with street-workers or a screening in the local association necessitates a massive amount of labor and social cooperation. It entails a collective attempt at translating and producing codes and modes of working to challenge the unequal positions participants occupy. The question is how to make concepts usable, not only intelligible, for people not used to theoretical discussion. It implies a form of political work that makes it possible to share in the complexity of debates, but also to distinguish (and possibly discriminate) those elements that are useful. With respect to the techniques of production, the challenge is not any easier. In order to build spaces of production from this project, it is not enough to simply avoid the privatization of the code - for example through the individualization of the author.

This valorization has to go in the direction of, I may be forgiven for the repetition, a committed and collective production of common notions that allows us to produce knowledges useful for struggles: to proceed through a method of "problem-posing" means "to create a problem that did not exist before" (Vercauteren 2007), rather than solve already existing problems.

This is meaningful to us because it represents a concrete way of tackling the question of *inventing new modes of organization*. For example, beyond The Laboratory, some of the participants started to use video streaming during the repossessions of mortgaged houses as part of a strategy to publicly denounce the violence of the crisis. This served to define a common project with people in a vulnerable situation, enabling them to discuss the use of images in their struggle and the networks of proliferation of such images.

The possibility of taking such decisions relied upon trust between the people involved in the struggle of PAH and the audiovisual artists that participated in The Laboratory. This kind of trust facilitated the positive dynamics of discussion, cooperation and production that took place in the *Postcool* laboratory and that helped all of us to collectively rethink our militancy, infusing our own political spaces not with solutions, but with new problems.

For me, the question is how to connect this process to other similar experiences such as the Instable Theatre Company of Madrid, in ferrocarrilclandestino.net, the militant inquiry ciudadessinfronteras.net, the podcast of ondaprecaria.com, the project communia.org and madrilonia.org, as well as many other techno-political projects that are engaging - especially after the Spanish Occupy movement - with network culture as a space in which to invent new ways of doing radical politics. It is about building a network of experiments that engage materially with an alternative way of organizing social production.

Finally, and to conclude, the process of militant research that we developed in this laboratory helped us - both practically and theoretically - to realize the importance of entangling categories, techniques and experiences as a way of constituting new modes of political organization within the contemporary functioning of global capital.

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RESPONSE

Sandro Mezzadra - History of Political Thought - University of Bologna

Francesco Salvini's article is a brilliant example of engaged writing. While it accounts for a collective experience of 'militant research' in the Raval, Barcelona, it also offers a subtle discussion of some of the most important topics at stake in intellectual debates surrounding contemporary capitalism as well as postcolonial and urban studies. Political and theoretical engagement enrich each other in Salvini's writing, making his article both a productive and an enjoyable reading. In what follows I will limit myself to some reflections on the 'method' of militant research (I) and on the use of Chakrabarty's concepts in Salvini's understanding of 'postcolonial capitalism' (II).

1.

"Militant research," writes Francesco, is "a committed and collective production of common notions (common analytical tools and practices) for and by a political community that allows for the production of knowledge useful for struggles" (p. 2). This is a good definition of militant research, combining insights coming from different theoretical traditions and practical experiences: from Italian autonomist Marxism to Latin American popular education. I also appreciate Salvini's statement that militant research must be understood as a crucial tool "for rethinking political organization." What I find potentially problematic is the emphasis on "a political community" as producer and user of militant research. I take this emphasis as a symptom of a widespread tendency in contemporary social movements across diverse geographic scales, often associated with a reference to "micro-politics." It is often the case (I am thinking here of some experiences I know in Italy as well as in Spain and in the UK) that militant research is used to reinforce the identity of a "political community" instead of opening it up toward new political possibilities and constellations, which should be in my opinion the main aim of militant research itself. In a totally different context, critically discussing the reduction of subjectivity to consciousness in French philosophy in the 1950s, Michel Foucault once spoke of "experiences" that have the task of "'tearing' the subject from itself in such a way that is no longer the subject as such, or that it is completely 'other' that itself so that it may arrive at its annihilation, its dissociation" (Foucault, 1991: 31). This seems to me a good definition of what the 'experience' of 'militant research' should be. I would emphasize in this sense even more than Francesco himself does that the "original us" he mentions (p. 7) should be understood as the main stake of militant research and not as its presupposition. This means that the form of organization prompted by militant research as a political method is open and centrifugal.

2.

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of the difference of "histories versus History" (p. 8). This is definitely a 'translation' that can appear as authorized by certain passages in Chakrabarty's chapter. The point is not the 'correct reading' of the text but rather its most productive use. As far as I am concerned, I think that speaking of an opposition of histories and History tends to end up proposing an opposition between 'concrete' and 'abstract' that is neither theoretically nor politically productive. Especially once associated with the use done by Salvini of Lefebvre's critical theory of the abstraction of urban space it risks ending up in some version of identity politics or communitarianism (which brings me back to the observations made under I). I am convinced that a different way of conceiving the relationship between History 1 and History 2, one that stresses the relevance of the encounters and clashes between the two, can be found in Chakrabarty himself, starting from his refusal to consider that relationship in dialectical terms (D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 66). Developing this different reading especially from the point of view of the production of subjectivity under contemporary capitalism would make an important contribution also to the method of militant research.

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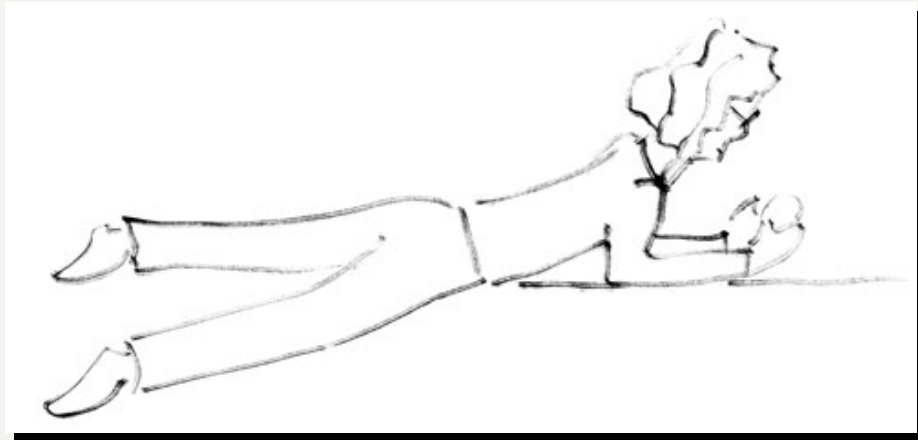
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0. situating ourselves///writing without deadlock

This text marks the beginning of a longer journey of articulation of some two years of embodied co-research in which we have been experimenting and debating as the nanopolitics group. Now is the first time we come together to write about our work. We have so far refrained from capturing our experimental process in writing, in order to give ourselves the time and space to experience and to make sense of our activities on registers that are different from the usual academic modalities. This has been a process of inventing a practice of sharing concerns and methods around contemporary embodied politics, a practice that has challenged divisions that we were familiar with: between activists, academics, artists, therapists; between 'those who write' and 'those who practice'; between those who are more reserved and those who are more 'assertive'. We know that it is easy for a dynamic to unfold in group processes in which some feel alienated and spoken for, and we have wanted to be attentive both to the different relationships to academic writing and to the power relations of knowledge production that traverse the group. For many of us, academic writing is the default mode. At the same time, for some of us, theorising and writing are not the primary modes of sense-making and of expression.



And so, we proceed with caution: already the usual separations described above have reaffirmed themselves in the authorship of the paragraphs that follow. The following text is not a manifesto, nor does it strive for completion; it is a first foray into presenting the nature of our work and maps out some of the frameworks we draw upon. The references we make are to theories that we like and that we came to the process carrying and wanting to explore. However, they are by no means the full measure of what we explored with nanopolitics: our everyday politics, organising and activism, friendships and relationships, collective processes, professionalised lives and workplaces, as well as life in London, a metropolitan city heavily invested in by financial capital.

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very bodies in the socio-economic and racially regimented spaces of the city, political activism and work.

Across and beyond the core collective, the nanopolitics group is composed of people based in London, UK, concerned with politics and with political organising and activist practices. Working in and around fields such as education, culture, therapy and care, members of the group bring a variety of experiences to thinking the body and politics. Some urgencies were shared across the first series of workshops, from which the collective began to emerge. A concern with thinking feminist and queer politics through bodily interactions and movement; a concern with alienated cultures of relationality in the workplace; with ways of using the body (that is, the voice, one's gaze, touch and sound) to produce dominance and hide vulnerability; the repression of expressions of unease or sickness in contexts of radical political as well as professional projects. In the past year and a half, we have organised a series of eighteen sessions, through which some 120 people passed in more casual ways.

We organise open and free workshops based on different methodologies and techniques from drama, dance, bodywork and therapy - facilitated by various practitioners, some of which are part of the core group. Sessions that involve moving, touching and sensing as much as discussing, remembering and imagining, drawing connections between experiences and political, social and organisational questions. Most of our sessions happen in university spaces that we have access to at this point (Queen Mary, University of London and Goldsmiths, University of London), but we also run sessions in social centres, student unions and the street.

Inevitably we begin from our experiences, our concepts and our problematisations. After all, we stuck with this nanopolitics group because we felt existing political and analytical languages could not give account of what we considered fundamental to explaining why and how we do what we do. We began 'nanopolitics' as a provocation that allowed us to create a space for articulating these things on our own terms. As such, the word 'nanopolitics' took on meaning as we went along. As a concept and as a practice it slowly garnered resonance, allowing us to address our practices in ways that were not quite possible before. It is crucial to us that nanopolitics is a *collective* space of articulation, and of the politicisation of what is normally relegated to the realms of the non-political, the 'not serious' or the whimsical.



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understood as social processes that happen to us. Nanopolitics seeks to find collective ways to pay attention to how bodies are constantly produced and reproduced, moving according to lines of power, force, affect and desire. Nanopolitics allows us to move between different registers of sensing, of perception and of articulation. We get to meet bodies we do not know, perhaps even bodies we did not know could be possible. We learn that we change through the body; in our micro-realities, our outside worlds, our friendships, our work, our political organising and our being in space and time. Nanopolitics is the name we have given to a multi-faceted questioning of the body in relation to - and as an irreducible aspect of - the political: the political as relationality, bodies and movement.



When we began this project, we found ourselves bringing a whole host of questions to the process: a list that has only grown and expanded with time. Curious, doubtful and ambivalent questions - our challenge was to address them in embodied encounters, shared experiments in movement, touch, vibration and speech. These questions, these problems and concerns, are what *move* us. They are the dynamic and unstable 'core' of nanopolitics. As we have moved through our encounters, we have asked:

How is the body shaped by politics? In our every-day lives, we perceive different kinds of corporealities emerging from micro-political practices: hard and soft bodies, different tones of voice, different kinds of movement, different kinds of being together, in the circulation, production, embracing and fear of different kinds of affects. We also know how macro-political decisions affect our bodies, making us fat or skinny, broken or healthy, or investing or disinvesting in certain parts of our bodies.

How is the body interpellated, identified, subjected - made productive? In a society dominated by the demands of capital accumulation, the body is posited primarily as labour power: the body and soul put to work as human resource. The demands put on the body in this context place it in a double bind, a contradictory injunction (Berardi, 2009: 65). On the one hand, the body is rendered *passive-political* in the imperative to become subjugated, its 'normal' structures formed as normalised effects of lost battles, subdued or temporarily inactive struggles. The body carries with it memories of what it wanted but failed to do, desires and possibilities that are of the body, But point beyond a past or a present. On the other hand, the body as affirmative of affects and traversed by enthusiasm. The body is *active-political*, it moves, pulls other bodies along, it is capable of affecting and being affected. Yet, this is equally a terrain of struggle as the body is rendered *hyper-active*. Neoliberal capitalism desperately needs 'liberated' bodies

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political practices with our bodies in mind? How to grasp the ways in which race, class and gender play out through bodily experiences without reducing the body to a socially constructed object that is unto itself? Our politics against deeply embodied racisms, sexism and elitisms will only ever be superficial and unconvincing if it does not alter the ways our bodies relate and move together.

How can we think a politics that starts from the movements of bodies? Or rather: how do we live politics all the time, how do our bodies resist and propose different paths often without our conscious knowing? This includes a politico-corporeal investigation into the social and the economic from the point of view of what our bodies refuse or demand to do - from our fatigue, stress, depressions to our addictions, compulsions and guilty resistances; from our procrastination and snoozing to the affirmations of our pleasures, desires and energies. Too often we have found that our political activism mirrors the hyper-productive mode of our work, with its over-work, stress and guilt. How to politically investigate and reshape work and politics from the point of view of what our bodies can do, from a consideration of our exhaustions, burn outs and blockages, our household of affects, passions and desires?

How can an undoing and reshaping of our bodies have an impact on an undoing and reshaping of our subjectivities and of our institutions? A practice of undoing our bodies does involve some sort of violence: the undoing of a body is the undoing of its traumas as well as the undoing of what our body has become comfortable with: The defensive reactions learned and absorbed to cope with those traumas, behaviours perceived as normal and natural that makes life 'easier' for our bodies. This undoing is therapeutic: not in a sense that necessarily makes us feel better, but in a sense that 'cures' our bodies both from traumas and repressions, and from a (neoliberal) poison that gets absorbed as a 'normality', a sense of freedom to take new paths. How can we undo the traumatic contractions, defensive patterns, imposed schemes of normality? How can this have an impact on the undoing of our subjectivities and our institutions, on the creation of different institutions from the crumbling of existing ones?



How to collectively sharpen our ways of sensing, our pre-cognitive, affective and desiring capacities, via practices of listening as well as of expressing? The body serves in these experiments as a kind of seismograph, as well as a surface of inscription and decoding. To undo some habits and to cultivate others, to build collective cultures of being around each other, new modes of intimacy and of distance; to navigate between personal narratives,

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holes of personal and exclusive commitments and the shallow utilitarianism of a networking modality? How to develop practices of self-care (not just individual but collective) that evade the neoliberal capture of self-help and self-management as well as new ageist solipsism? How to take seriously the ecologies of the social, environmental and psychic by investigating a fourth dimension, that of sensation, movement and experience?

2. some nanopolitical coordinates, cadences and caveats

When we write 'nanopolitics' here, we do not refer to something unitary, but to a complex multidimensional proposition, both 'ontological' and 'epistemological'; we speak of it both as a real mode of politics, a practice, and as a register of perception. It is a mode of sensitivity, or better an analytics of the reference system for normality that concerns not only texts and modes of speech, but gesture, facial expressions, habits, practices and forms of life - what Foucault (1976) understands as 'discourse'. Inscribed in nanopolitics is also a notion of 'scale', a set of practices and concepts that attune us to a dimension of the political, which is often forgotten in, but intrinsically connected to what is usually called 'political'.

Nanopolitics is both about politics *on* the body and politics *from* the body, as well as the intersections between the two in the repressions, resistances and resonances in and all around us. Nanopolitics is less a matter of scale understood as a level or unit of analysis, and more about an attention to the 'scale' of embodied intensities which can concern groups as much as bodies of individuals. As such, nanopolitics inevitably implicates the micro and the macro-political, although there is nothing straight-forward in this implication. When we speak of micropolitics, we are drawing on the work of Felix Guattari (1996: 172) and others, which means a register of politics that is attentive to the relational and social, to compositions within and across groups. This 'micro' is not merely one of scale, but a matter of a sensitivity to social bodies and group processes, as informed by the trajectory of Institutional Analysis that emerged from experimental clinics such as St.Alban and La Borde in France in the 1950s. This 'micro' positions itself with regard to the knowledges and sensitivities that constitute the 'macro', the latter being the realm of more abstract, national or global political processes. 'Macro' and 'micro' are inseparable, according to Guattari; we add to this the idea of a 'nano' dimension which concerns knowledges of and sensitivities to the body, affects and relational dynamics.

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Nanopolitics develops different understandings of the affective, relational workings of forces and power. With 'nano' we talk about how what occurs at the level of the group, the world, the institution or the social comes to exist under our skin, in our guts, through our voice, in our touch and in the ways we feel. Our complex and practically-oriented notion of 'nano' began from an intuitive use of the prefix 'nano' to designate our political practice as different yet complimentary to the 'micro' and the 'macro'. Since then, we have also strayed into the realms of technoscience and popular culture in the search for orientations that can help shape how we make sense of what it is that we are engaged in. In common parlance the prefix 'nano' is used to indicate something very very small, beyond what the eye can perceive. It is derived from the Ancient Greek 'nannus' meaning 'dwarf' or 'small man'. In scientific discourse 'nano' denotes a particular measure, namely a unit the size of one billionth of a metre (cf. Hayles, 2004: 11). As a form of measure, which operates on the scale where materiality itself is constituted, it encounters matter not as separate and solid, but at the level of the formation or dissolution of solidity.

Nanoscience is a science of the isolation and objectification of the 'nano', its external measure and manipulation. Nanoscience is a gaze that presents what we are made up by, what passes through us, what forms our environment as field of technical intervention. Nanoscience is also a frontier of the capitalist economy, a new area of financial investment and of commodification. The way that we deploy 'nano' in our designation of 'nanopolitics' pertains to an experiential and experimental affirmation that 'nano' is felt rather than seen. It is not simply an external measure, but a field we inhabit and sometimes also feel displaced in. It is where our bodies can take measure of themselves, immanently measuring and thus transforming what they can do. Still, nanoscience holds interesting orientations for our nanopolitics if we, (not just) speculatively, posit the identity between the manipulators and the manipulated. Nanoscience suggests that the properties of an object change with scale due to changes in the surface area to volume ratio (cf. Mongillo, 2007). We take this as an opening towards thinking, not just talking about a more nuanced way of understanding the world we inhabit, but about different ways of doing so. Consequently, the 'scale' at which we analyse something changes the properties of the object of analysis, even if the 'nano', 'micro' and 'macro' are somehow 'organically' if not seamlessly connected. In these terms, the notion of the body changes the meaning between 'nano', 'micro' and 'macro': We might say that if macropolitics and micropolitics work on 'the body' - the determinate singular of the living corpse of the mass individual - nanopolitics as active politics flows from bodies in the plural in so far as they always find ways to come together.

Something the size of 'nano' is seen by sensing/feeling; it involves using a kind of microscope called 'cantilever', which has a tip the diameter of an atom. This tip 'feels' the proximity of the atoms of that surface as an attraction or repulsion and bends in response (Frankel and Whitesides, 2009: 4). 'Nano' is not 'microscopic' because it is smaller than micro, but because there is nothing scopic about it: it must be felt; sometimes with the eyes. In this sense 'nano',

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inhabit - we are not dealing with isomorphic dolls that can be unpacked and compared by an observer: their relation is not one of a neat fitting together, but of a complex interplay between heterogeneous levels, between different scales with each their range of structurations, solidities, dynamisms.

3. tentative summations///nano and the political field

As a political field, 'nano' has many (hi)stories. The least we can say is that less and less it is taken as something that simply is (as a base corporeality or a natural sociality) and that more and more it is put under external measure and control. As Patricia Clough (2009: 50) has pointed out in relation to affect, "ideological interpellation and subject disciplining no longer are the centre-piece of an understanding of sociality." Even though both of these forms of control still occur, we must be attentive to the affective backgrounds that stimulate ways of life. The development of global capitalism - the totalisation of the macropolitical - works through the intensification of the putting to work of the nanopolitical, "when the machine becomes planetary or cosmic, there is an increasing tendency for assemblages to miniaturise, to become micro- [and we must add nano-] assemblages." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1998: 213).

This text poses many questions. For us, this questioning is part of a nanopolitical practice. However, nanopolitics is not just a set of questions, it is a situated space of questioning, a site in which the nanopolitical is worked and reflected on, and from which new questions arise. It is a questioning that is at once circular and expansive, intensive and extensive. There are many ways in which we interact with others, and lots of things that we can do with others that do not come from reason, argument or speaking - even as they intertwine and subvert one another. Often, there is a hierarchy between reason and the physical. Even where there is not, often a dichotomy remains. To 'start from the body' is to give attention differently, to become and move together in other modes, rhythms, to begin to break down the rule of reason of the body as well as the separation between the two on which this rule rests. However, it is easy to fall back into the familiarity of intellectualising as a mode that we are comfortable with, for which the body becomes an object or an abstract concept.

We see nanopolitics is a collective process of becoming, and of care. Beyond and aside from the interactions between individuals within a group, nanopolitics designates an ensemble of different bodies and the multiple processes which produce, extend or expand the nanopolitical. To bring a political reading and practice to our lived, felt or suffered experiences is not easy in a culture where the body is either repressed, essentialised, medicalised or fetishised: distinguishing between various pitfalls in speaking about one's embodied experience is a key aspect to our nanopolitical practice, not just within our group but *vis a vis* an outside. Having an enhanced awareness of and sensitivity towards the body is helpful, but we can still close in on ourselves and become self-referential, self-obsessed, trapped in ourselves. The question could be how to, in any sort of everyday situation - at work, at home, in the street - produce a shift from the self as the ontological point of reference (i.e. one's ability to sense and to perceive) towards an attention to relationality and collectivity. The body, then, not as the container of an individual

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COUNTERMAPPING THE UNIVERSITY

Queen Mary Countermapping Collective - Queen Mary, University of London

Responses to ideological and financial attacks on higher education have been widespread. Students, faculty, and staff have mobilized around the world, not simply to reverse cuts in funding but to rethink along new lines the means and ends of education. For the past half-century, higher education held a privileged place in a larger social compact that promised upward mobility through expanded access to professional credentials. Foreclosing this portal has stood as a cancellation of the future as it was once understood by much of the working and middle class. The message to those who are not already the beneficiaries of increasingly stratified vectors of opportunity is that there is no place for them in the enchanted land once reachable by vessels propelled by winds known as equality and progress.

In distinction to this narrowing optic, the demonstrations and mobilizations responding to recent attacks seek to stir up their own storms of protest. They chart their own course for what the future might be. Due in large part to the expansion of higher education over the past half-century, the university, once the preserve of specialized knowledge that does no more than be for itself, has become a site where activists of various stripes pose the question of what and who education is for. These critical interrogations reflect not simply on the aims of higher education, but on its means as well. They reassemble shards of ruptured disciplinary authority, protocols of expertise that have gone out of service, methods and forms taken up with new feelings, tone, and consequences. The resulting mobilizations share with cultural studies the goal of expanding the techniques, objects, and aims of what is worth knowing. They realign the affinities and affiliations by which critical engagement moves in the world.

It is in this spirit that we share in this research thread some exemplary work by an interdisciplinary and geographically-dispersed collective that sought a concrete response to the baleful changes visited upon their campus and its social surroundings. Appropriating the genre of the campus map, graduate students at Queen Mary University London and University of North Carolina Chapel Hill have produced a countermap of the university. Elegant in design, yet multi-purposed, their mapping of alternative uses and critiques takes the form of a poster-sized doubled sided print which locates the university within its larger societal force field (the map's front side), and stages an arena for playing that field by means of a board game (which appears on the reverse side). In sharp contrast to the political geography of curricula intended to assimilate students to an already settled matter and progress-toward-a-degree, an unproblematic temporal beat measured by accumulated credit-hours, the critical cartographical work of this collective reallocates the energies of their seminars and research to produce alternate forms of knowledge and means for its legitimization.

At once serious and playful, the work of this counter-mapping opens a range of political and pedagogical timbres through which the apparent fixity of the present is rendered fungible and the tone of response multiple. A variety of futures and possible courses of action can be imagined and explored in the present, both inside and outside of the classroom. At once strategic and tactical, practical and conceptual, focused and elastic, the composite map and game provide a political technology by which the boundaries that define the present limits of the possible might be redrawn. Both the artifact and the interview below invite response across a wide array of media, including related contributions to this thread of Lateral. As co-editors of the thread, we hope that you will join this conversation and mobilization. Please do contact us with your commentaries and interventions. Our hope is that this example can be set in relation to others that are being devised in the midst of this vital contestation.

Bruce Burgett, University of Washington Bothell
Randy Martin, New York University



UNIVERSITIES IN QUESTION

COUNTERMAPPING
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LATERAL MOVES

Interview with the Queen Mary Countermapping Collective

Manuela Zechner - Tim Stallmann - Maria Catalina Bejarano Soto - Liz Mason-Deese
Rakhee Kewada - Bue Rübner Hansen - Mara Ferreri - Camille Barbagallo



What was the process you undertook to create the map?

For some of us the process started with a reflection on the question of 'what is the university?' during a PhD seminar. Taking this question and thinking through the materiality of how we inhabit the university, we found ourselves in our first years of yet another degree in yet another institution, tired of what the neo-liberal university makes us be and do and urgently desiring a collective place and practice within it. We dodged PhD writing and seminar coursework by proposing a collective process of making a countermap. From the outset we hoped that the process would allow us to engage with the university in a more collective, inspiring and transformative way.

For others of us the process started through an encounter with the practice of countermapping and the Counter Cartographies Collective (3C's); an encounter that resonated with us affectively and intellectually, seeming to point to a potential modality of engaging with the university.

Once we had set up the parameters and secured funding for a collaborative process between our group at Queen Mary and the 3Cs, we began to undertake extensive preparation. This involved two months of gathering data, reflecting and discussing: between ourselves, with staff and students from Queen Mary, through the medium of a questionnaire, statistics and our experiences. Out of this grew an extensive archive, out of which we began to develop the map and a collective working space.

May 2010 saw us move this preparation into the second phase, beginning the map design and inviting other people to participate in making and producing it, via an open call for collaborators and participants. We spent intensive weeks working together in London, setting up our headquarters in the business school where many of us were based, and organised three open events in order to engage different groups of people.

We began with a reflection on the imaginaries of the university, followed by a collective drift around Queen Mary Mile End campus. Second, we held a workshop on how to make a counter-map using open source software. Finally, we held a discussion with different collectives and people in and around the university about how counter-mapping can be of use to education movements and groups, as a research method as well as organizing tool.

These events brought many new discussions, lines of investigation and people to our process, leading to further intensive working periods in May and September. Without being fully aware of it, we were surfing on an early buzz of 'mapping' in the city. At the same time, the British Library hosted an exhibition of maps which was very useful to our research and aesthetics, and there seemed to be significant interest in processes of counter-mapping.

Where did the idea come from, what are the politics of mapping you'd like to advance?

To begin with, it's a countermap, not a traditional map. One side presents the countermap and the other is a 'game'. The Counter Cartographies Collective's practice and politics provided a good background and content and together we all brought our various experiences of mapping, making relational tools and organising. The disorientation map they made of the University of North Carolina inspired us to further think about mapping as a research methodology; specifically as a form of understanding complex flows and blockages and as a way of visualising them and politicising them in the process.

It is a countermap not simply because it sits in opposition to existing maps of Queen Mary, the British university system, migratory flows or of fortress Europe, but also because it's a process of creating counter-knowledges and perspectives. The process of producing the map is itself a reflection on the knowledge produced through mapping, its accessibility and possible uses, as well as on the tools through which these knowledges are produced and disseminated (open source and free data), and the ways it is disseminated (creative commons).

It is also a countermap because of our own position in making it. The game itself is a countermap in the sense that it counters the idea of a map as a bird's eye view of complex dynamics. The game makes sense only if you play it, and playing it means to virtually partake in the frustrations of the filter mechanisms of universities and the nation state, their arbitrariness (the flip of a coin determines where you move; both money and chance), their fundamental unfairness, but also to look for alternatives, shortcuts, ways out and ways in.

How did the project itself help cohere the collective?

This long and sustained process lasting from February till September, with its different intensities and configurations of research and work, allowed both the project and the collective to grow in a rich and complex way. Having a regular rhythm of meetings and a headquarter space meant that people could fully focus on the project. The everyday experience of sharing food, figuring out working patterns and having much informal socialising time through which the project also came to be

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reflected on – collectively dealing with desires, pleasures and limitations – were important for the becoming of the collective. This was particularly important because we were trying to invent a space for research, analysis, politics and collective collaboration that we hoped to be able to carry beyond the project in some way.

The enthusiastic reception the countermap and game received in different universities, groups and networks was very encouraging and happened to feed directly into recent mobilizations around education struggles in the UK. This has made the countermap not just a useful tool for teaching and organising, but one that circulates in a space that has come to be not just that of individual institutions and projects, but also that of a 'movement'.

How does this transform understandings of organizing and interdisciplinarity?

We started with questions, not answers, and we used all tools we had at our disposal, coming from many different disciplines and backgrounds. Interdisciplinarity may not be the best concept to describe the process since none of us are actually 'within' a discipline in our own research, nor in our education path. As such, the working process was the coming together of a group of people with different trajectories of inter- and transdisciplinarity. We came together not as a group of people wanting to state something determinate or to prove a certain point. Rather we formed as a group around a set of shared questions and the desire to make a countermap. This has made the process open and practical.

Our research and analysis has not been influenced solely by notions of academic disciplines. We were not trying to fulfil certain expectations and criteria of so-called 'neutrality' and 'objectivity'. Instead, it has been a practical process in which our mode of working has been formed dialogically by the group and the problems at hand, rather than in reference to tradition or authority.

With all our diverging experiences of the university and the different ways in which studying seems to engender discipline and self-discipline, it was clear that the university was not some object outside us which we could study from a neutral perspective. The complexity of our often diverging experiences of the university, and all of us being within, outside and beyond the university at once, is a complexity which cannot be divorced from what the university is as an institution; a site of labour and study, a filter and a border. For us it is a space which is not a coherent neat structure or objective set of relations, but a strategic field, with certain problems and contradictions running through it. With our map and game we tried to make an intervention into this space and to organise around these problems. As a group this really helped us cohere and create our own space. Not organising around some foreign banner such as an academic discipline, or someone else's problems, we were able to find our own legs. There is no doubt this had been a reason why this process has been affectively, intellectually and politically much more satisfying and inspiring than regular group exercises or 'learning experiences'.

How do questions of tone / voice / look / humour / outrage / critique get designed in?

We all started with different understandings and ideas, so the process of visualising and writing was one of collective design involving discussion, debate and continuous feedback. Small working groups fed back to the main group every couple of hours or at the end of the day. Everyone participated in the visual research and design, with all visual and textual material checked, argued about and edited collectively.

Our different histories and approaches to design, critique and affectivity generated many discussions that allowed us to find ways of building the map and game on multiple layers and registers. The resulting design may be bumpy in some places, but the fact that contrasting aesthetics and approaches are present in it makes it more interesting for us than a smooth one-dimensional design done by one person. Importantly, we wanted the map to speak transversally across a range of levels. We therefore conceived of it as based around a number of key layers: a subjective one, mainly constituted by the narratives and of course drawings; an institutional one, constituted by an anatomy of the campus; a display of flows, actors and institutions also on the level of the city (London); and a layer speaking to global flows, borders and actors. With the knowledge that there are many experiences that constitute the relations between the university, migration regimes, money flows and policies of austerity, the question was how to make it look readable without resulting in a homogenising, polished, final look. This also speaks to the impossibility of creating a total picture of the complexities of the subject.

We had a lot of discussions about the presentational style and the aesthetics of the map. We wanted it to look both playful and serious. It was soon clear that we wanted to go beyond the machinist look of much 'systemic' countermapping (as in the style of the maps of Bureau d'études for instance, which were a key point of reference) and also giving up on the pretence of scientific authority (no pie charts, not too many standardised icons). Instead, we have little brains playing on the idea of 'brain-drain', sea monsters referring to real baroque navigation charts, as well as to the real monsters of bureaucracy and border control. The idea of a Sea of Bureaucracy was intended as both a real lived experience for many (we used the text of an actual form you have to complete) and of course also a humorous nod to some of the affects of migration and administration. It is hoped that the diverse and fluid design illustrates the point that it is a map of movement and conflict rather than of fixed systems, filters-border mechanisms and set borders. We tried to conceptualise this

into the vague idea of 'techno-baroque'. Techno standing in for the technocratic, bureaucratic, pointing to all of the insane digital and bricks 'n' mortar infrastructures of profiling, differential access, containment, information gathering and legal requirements. Baroque as the excessive and exceeding, monstrously deformed, echoing the irrational paranoid about the foreigner and the international student that fortress Europe and fortress UK have built and continue to build. In this way, the aesthetic is designed to mock the techno-baroque nature of the current power dispositifs, and to convey the idea that systems of security and control produce their own monsters, imaginary as well as real.

We also tried to situate our systematic critique in some of the subjective positions that run through and are produced by the institutions, flows and apparatuses we mapped. We mapped the salaries, communications and thoughts of staff in the QMary section of the map, and we presented a few speech bubbles with the testimony of various people passing through border agencies. Their presence in the map situates the information and data about VFS Global (the private agency managing Visa application procedures for over 46 countries worldwide, making good business with this) and the UK government.

How might we think about the map as a cultural-political artifact? What kinds of materiality and social practice might it engender? What strategies of dissemination/distribution does it lend itself to (and what avenues was it possible to pursue)?

We all shared a sensitivity to the material aspect of a map as a political tool of communication and organisation, drawing from the experience of the 3C's but also from other experiences in the group with political documents and actions. The idea of a map was from the very beginning born out of a reflection on the limitations of other forms of academic research and dissemination and also on the simplistic and traditionalist approaches of most mainstream activist material on the issues surrounding the -then burgeoning- mobilisations around cuts to funding of higher education in the UK. We wanted to make something people would want to put up on their walls, something that was beautiful and not patronising, something that could travel by itself.

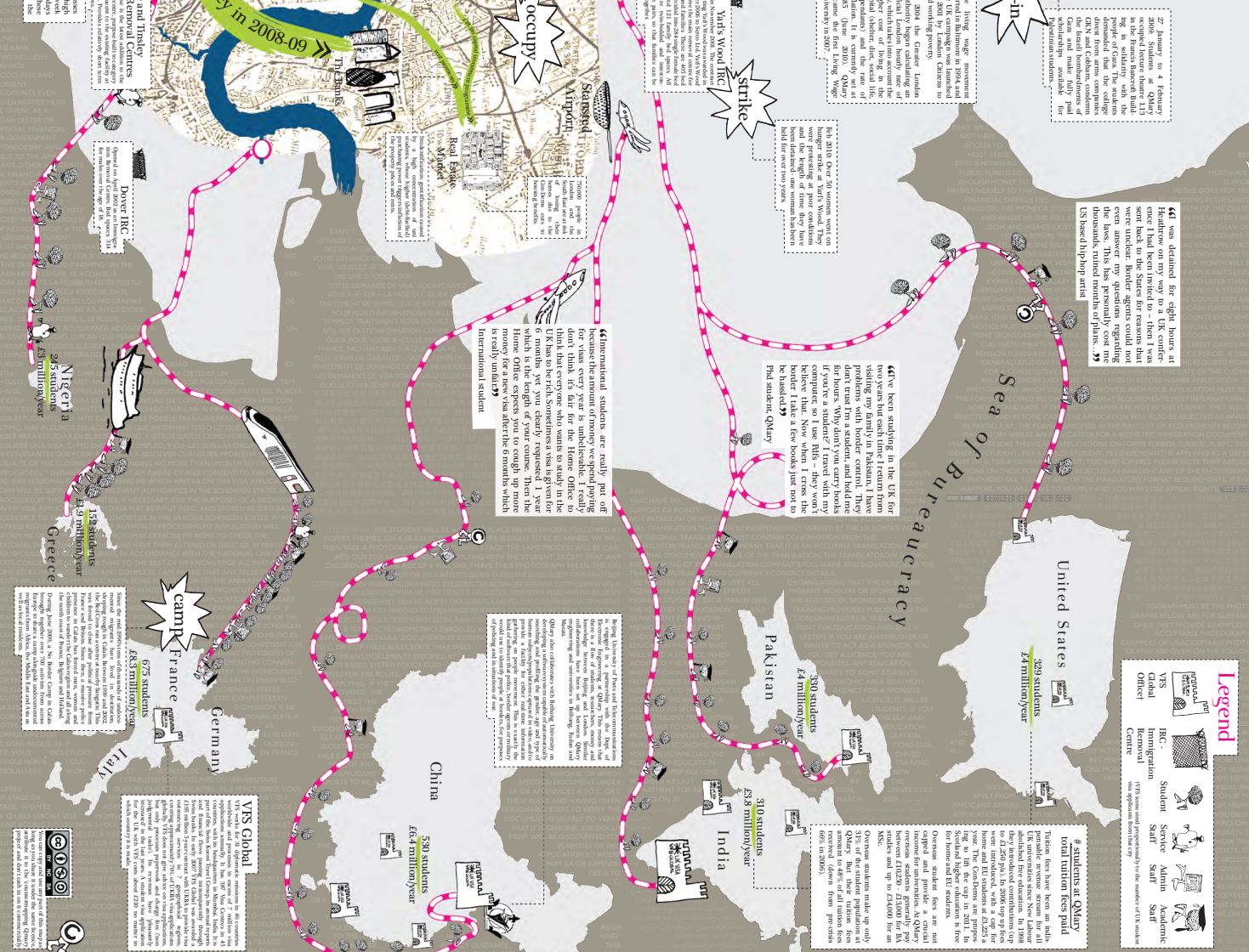
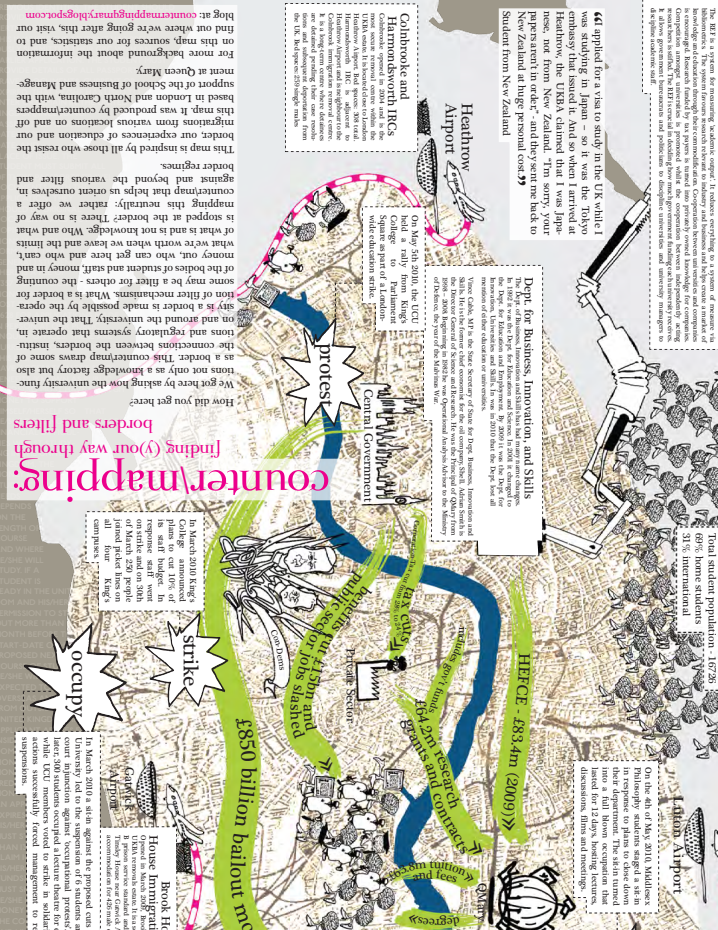
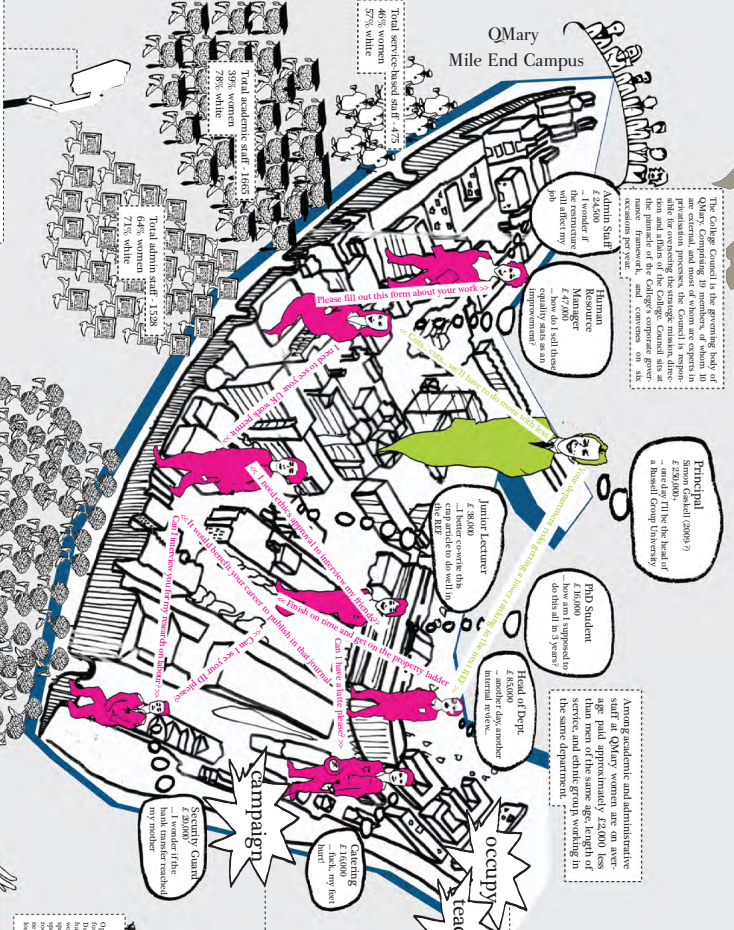
The free distribution and possible uses of the map were built into the design of the whole project. This started with the open public events we co-ordinated in May and continuing throughout all the forms of dissemination and distribution - presentation, game playing - we have done since the countermap was printed. Thanks to the format we have been able to give it away at meetings, conferences and to organise game playing sessions on our campus and elsewhere. We have also been able to use it as teaching material in different departments, in our own and in other universities, as well as using it to discuss the context of alternative educational spaces such as free schools, and to leave in friendly self-organised spaces and radical infoshops and activist spaces.

What has been the reception to this project, as best you can tell. Have there been unexpected or unintended responses? Has it inspired kindred projects/mobilizations?

The reception has been good, and quite diverse. Some people like the map, some the game, and people stress different aspects of both. In general people really appreciate the fact that it looks very different from most activist and political material. A staff member at Queen Mary in the International Student Admissions Office asked for copies to help her explain to her British colleagues the issues faced by many international students. A presentation to a group of professors highlighted how little our own lecturers knew about the difficulties faced by their own international students.

The game has worked very well as a tool that forces people to discuss their own and others' experiences of education and border crossings. We specifically designed it as a relational device to get the players to share their experiences and frustrations, and to imagine alternatives. The colourfulness and playfulness of the map has brightened up many a grey bureaucratic political meeting, and inspired others to invent similar tools of mapping, acting and organising in relation to other institutions. We've had requests for people to use our InDesign files for making their own maps (the 'code' of the map is open and free), and given workshops to other groups making their own maps of the university.

QMary Mile End Campus





LATERAL MOVES - ACROSS DISCIPLINES

LATERAL MOVES - ACROSS DISCIPLINES is an edited conversation with Randy Martin and three members of the Cultural Studies Praxis Collective (CSPC): Miriam Bartha, Diane Douglas, and Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren. The original conversation took place at the University of Washington's Simpson Center for the Humanities in 2007. The transcript of the conversation was reworked and revised by the interlocutors and Bruce Burgett, the co-director (along with Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren) of the CSPC. The document as a whole surfaces and addresses a series of questions about interdisciplinarity, cultural studies, and the humanities; about creativity, agency, and advocacy; about different forms of professional, disciplinary, and civic education; and about knowledge, labor, and organizing.

In the current historical moment as yet another "crisis of the humanities" reshapes the possibilities of collaborative work across disciplines and sectors, discussions of these questions help to map some of the potential risks and opportunities on the horizon. In order to highlight these potentials, we invite readers to send us comments on the conversation. Following a strategy used by the CSPC in its meetings, we ask each contributor to choose a brief passage, sentence, or phrase that they found useful, provocative, or engaging, and to amplify on its significance in the current moment. Responses will be added to the text.

As an initial publication for the Universities in Question thread of lateral, we offer the conversation as an example of work that draws upon one of a range of collaborations undertaken over the past five years that have entangled the thread co-curators, Bruce Burgett and Randy Martin. We present the piece in a spirit of self-reflection and self-criticism that is meant to seed additional work and invite other participants. Our hope is that this practice of additive and affiliative critique and creation will model for future readers a mode of engagement with a conversation that we see as ongoing.



We thought we'd begin by asking you talk about your interest in the field of cultural studies. Can you sketch for us the path that brought you to your current work at the intersections of arts, education, cultural studies, and arts and cultural policy?



That's a nice invitation to articulate a creation myth. As a kid, I had a passion for science and, in the last couple years of high school, I had the chance to be seriously involved in doing experimental medical research. The college I went on to - UC San Diego - was over 90% pre-med, and that cured me of my interest in medicine. Even then, I found the impossibility of having a broad conversation about medicine from within the pre-med formation really striking. In some ways, I think of this discomfort as the impulse that pushed me toward the first in a series of lateral moves across disciplines. It's a migratory movement, not one that is nondisciplinary. I am still marked, as we all are, by the banding around my wings wherever I go. But the question is what you take with you and what you notice that's different as you move across disciplinary lines.

My disenchantment with medicine led me down a circuitous path: from UC San Diego to UC Berkeley to UW Madison to CUNY; from urban studies to sociology to dance; from working in a paint factory to graduate student organizing to writing a dissertation on the dance company I was in, led by Claudia Gitelman. The dissertation looked at the process of dance creation from the first rehearsal to the performance, and the shift in authority from something that's linguistic to something that's embodied and gives rise to a community. At the same time, I was studying acting and creating political theater, where questions about collective creativity and organization, authority and authorship, and community were also foregrounded. All of this led me to a position as a generalist in a small liberal arts college and, eventually, to NYU, where I currently direct the Master of Arts in Arts Politics.

As I look back on it, my trajectory speaks, I think, to something about the disciplinary and institutional predicament of cultural studies as distinct from the humanities. In the humanities, the place from which you generalize, "the human," can be taken for granted. If you begin from this other location, "culture" or "the cultural," you wind up setting off from the particular. You begin from a specific location and ask, "How do I generalize? Where do I generalize from? Is this a generalization of self? What's left out and what's included?"



That predicament also speaks to tensions active within the institutional location where we're holding this conversation today, the UW Simpson Center for the Humanities. Like other humanities centers, the Simpson Center is a site set apart from disciplines and departments; it's intended to permit and promote a shuttling among the humanities, the arts, the social sciences, and, increasingly, the natural sciences. It's supposed to produce knowledge that's transformative of these divisions. At the same time, the Center sits within the Division of the Humanities and is often seen as having the responsibility of supporting the actually existing humanities. The challenge is how not to be bound by the Center's emplacement with the Division of the Humanities.

Speaking from this not atypical institutional location, my question is how cultural studies does and can operate within this kind of contradictory formation, one that aims to promote the production of critical knowledge that is both "interdisciplinary" and "humanistic?" How does the predicament of not assuming the generality of a tradition of knowledge play out in your current practice as Director of the MA in Arts Politics?



Great questions. The location of the Arts Politics program in the Department of Art and Public Policy in the Tisch School of the Arts might seem oxymoronic. After all, what is public policy doing in an arts school? What's interesting in this context is the relationship between the local, institutional formation of Arts Politics and the translocal, intellectual formation of cultural studies. Even as we see the emergence over the past two decades of professional organizations designed to institutionalize cultural studies as a field or discipline, the way in which professional socialization works in relationship to labor markets and institutions today is very different from the world that led to the formation of disciplines at the end of the nineteenth century.

One result is that when people form the question, "Should we have a cultural studies department or should cultural studies remain interdisciplinary?" there's always a temptation to appeal to the discursive field formation of "cultural studies" as evidence to support disciplinary forms of institutionalization. It is different than asking, "Should we have an English Department?" or "Should we have a History Department?" You almost never have to ask those questions, even if the questions should be rightfully asked! The architecture of disciplinary institutionalization assumes that the epistemology of the field is stable.

My starting points, including those that led to the development of the Arts Politics program, are different. I tend to begin with questions about organizing, about activism, about reading what resources are at hand, and about how those resources articulate with a set of projects: who they mobilize, and what they organize. For me, what's interesting and provocative about cultural studies is that it can keep this second set of questions alive by dwelling on a theory-practice dynamic that references both global conceptual or intellectual spaces and local or translocal spaces of institutional practice.

In the cases of the Arts Politics program and the Art and Public Policy department at Tisch, the local institutional problem was how to create a space outside the traditional arts conservatory programs that could begin to address the question of how artists get their work into the world. So the department was addressing a problem of

conservatory formation - a very strong version of disciplinarity - as well as the ways in which professional demands impede upon university education. The concept of "artistic citizenship" spoke to the question of what you do in a predicament where you might have incredible chops as an artist and you still don't have a world that's receptive to your art. That's the question we wanted to put to our students.



So artists are repositioned as advocates of their own work and for the public role of the arts more generally?



Exactly. Let me give an example of how we addressed this challenge in our undergraduate curriculum. We created a first-year program that would get at the tensions among a conservatory program, a professional program, and an arts program within a university. The project of the department was to create a curriculum where the core content is a practice, essay writing, and that practice is posed to engage art analytically and critically. The point is to create a trajectory that advocates for representing the arts, that uses essay writing as a voice, and that develops public intellectuals on behalf of the arts. The curriculum works as a vehicle to ask the freshmen, how do you generalize yourself?

Again, this is very different from how freshmen composition gets installed in the humanities, where the work of generalization tends to be taken for granted. You acquire skills to do essay writing, but the form is already set. You insert yourself into this universal form (which is also a universal self), and become generally educated. But if you can't take form for granted, the path that moves you from your particular, located experience to your place as an artist who moves in the world is indeterminate. You can't take the form of expression or its generalization for granted. That's a huge struggle for these first-year students, many of whom want to focus on making art and don't want to be bothered with thinking about the form their self-representation should take.

At least that was the founding project at the undergraduate level. Our next step was to do something similar at the graduate level. But the immediate question that came up when we proposed the graduate program was, why locate it in an arts school? What made Arts Politics engaging were the links among kindred schools at NYU, like Public Policy, but also the arts, which are also dispersed across the university. Each college made a claim to the program.



That's a hard one: to find the right moment to respect the historical trajectories of an institution, to pass beyond the territorialities that come with those histories, and to create new spaces for work in the arts. This new work is not something that could have been anticipated from within those traditions; it comes, surprisingly, from a specific critical engagement that pushes at the notion of what the arts are and what they can do.



At NYU, the dynamic you're describing became an opportunity to organize partnerships across different colleges, to sit down with deans who were very skeptical that something that had a critical epistemology could be located in an arts school, even though there are Ph.D. programs in performance studies and cinema studies at Tisch. Those programs are over-determined because the degrees are nominally, at least, granted through the graduate school, the arts and sciences division, as opposed to the arts school. So there's an interesting tension there, a legitimization of art as an epistemology, and as a way of knowing.

The Arts Politics program was an effort to do some internal organizing around the arts, so that art - even in a small and very modest sense - could be a vehicle for beginning to mobilize some new coalitions and develop some new passageways. The conception of the program was to keep it very small, so that there'd be enough room at the table for people from different colleges and different graduate programs. I would say the litmus test is if the term 'arts politics' makes any sense to the students.



We're doing something similar with our Interdisciplinary Arts major at UW Bothell, and there's a lot of resonance between what you're describing at NYU and what we've been thinking about and working on. There are also resonances, different ones, with our Masters of Arts in Cultural Studies. I'm wondering if you could speak to the challenges of the type of approach to program building you're describing.



One of the problems we encountered in terms of proprietary claims among different existing programs at NYU concerned the category of "the cultural." The first iteration of our program was called "Cultural Politics," and that generated huge anxiety. The

category mobilized multiple claims on what, where, and who had the right to do something under the aegis of culture, and it exposed the contradictions, too. If five different colleges are making a proprietary claim on the term "culture" then they're all involved in undermining their own claim!



Right. But didn't that experience also prove that culture was an appropriate term to use for a program meant to draw from a spectrum of disciplines and schools?



It turns out that not everyone believes in the power of the semantic, even though some very prominent semioticians got involved in this struggle. Conventional real estate claims were being made. NYU is a school whose endowment is in real estate, so it's no surprise that academic politics get expressed in those terms.

But I now think that shifting from "cultural politics" to "arts politics" was felicitous. The word is not a neologism, but the formulation is. It says something about the moment of cultural studies and its own turn from a kind of unreflective generality to an emphasis on thinking about the specific locations where and how it intervenes. In this sense, reducing the semantic field of the program actually opened it up. It dissolved the imperial claim that was being made through the category of culture. It made it possible to recognize the authority of the arts school to give a credential in something called 'arts.' It also contained an ambiguity of meaning: What *is* arts politics? Is it the politics of art? Is it a claim that politics issue from the arts? Is it a claim that arts can activate other things? Certainly one of the questions we wanted to pose was about activism: What is activism? If activism is part of the program, what is it doing in a university? What does it mean to credential activism? We wanted to address these questions and 'cultural politics' didn't pose them with as much specificity.



You are naming a moment in cultural studies that requires it to turn from unreflective generality to critical self-reflection on where and how it intervenes. I think that's right. Here's a parallel example. The Cultural Studies Praxis Collective (CSPC) has been performing some of its work on cultural studies under the banner of the "public humanities," in part as a result of local institutional factors concerning the mission of the Simpson Center to engage in and support public scholarship in the humanities. Under this banner, we've had the opportunity to undertake cultural work that is more affiliative, more engaged, and more transformative of university-based knowledge practices, including those housed in the traditional humanities.

One common thread woven through these local projects concerns the question of what might be the next steps for cultural studies if it is going to promote and support a praxis-oriented understanding of research and teaching. I hear you suggesting that these next steps may require a greater awareness of how we do and can develop research and teaching projects that work across sectors, including disciplines, both on and off university campuses. It is this critical and practical engagement with other sectors that is going to put pressure on the unreflective generality you've just described, and it is the development of joint projects that will necessitate action and reflection, pushing the question of where and how one intervenes.



Let me add another layer to that. We've been talking about introducing critical *and* instrumental questions about politics, advocacy, and activism into professional programs in the arts and humanities. These interventions challenge humanities programs, which don't tend to think of themselves as oriented toward vocations or professions, even as they reproduce academic career tracks. But it also challenges arts programs, which often think of themselves very much in vocational and professional terms, to re-conceive and redirect their work. I'm wondering about the connections between professional or vocational training and other questions about cultural labor and activism.



You're right. Compared to the humanities, the trajectory of the arts is a more professional one, and even in earlier iterations of artistic training a more vocational one. In the early part of the twentieth century, with the development of arts education programs, that instrumentality was directed not towards art-making, but towards civic formation. To take up some of those trajectories is very different than, again, the generalizing claims of the humanities about what it means to be well-educated, well-rounded, a whole person.

In this context, the formulation of arts politics also calls attention to the relationship of new interdisciplinary programs to the university. It insists that the claim of the university to be at the center of knowledge-making, to be at the origin

of the production of knowledge, is no longer secure, as Miriam points out. Educationally, this decentering of the university means that graduate programs can no longer justify themselves either, in the case of the arts, in instrumental terms as credentialing programs or, in the case of the humanities, in non-instrumental terms as purely academic. In an arts school like Tisch, a concrete, critical possibility had to replace instrumental claims about the purpose of the Arts Politics program.

As we articulated it, the program is designed for people who are already doing work in the world and want to make a path back through the university. It provides for a lateral move from the domain of professional practice, which is where I would say the locus of cultural knowledge production is now, in terms of the cultural industries. It's not in the university, unless we re-conceive of arts sectors within the university as a part of those industries, a move that entails its own risks. Instead, the university becomes a place for staging and reflecting on an encounter. In our program, it's an encounter between artists, people who work in arts institutions, and people who do critical, curatorial, other sorts of representational politics around the arts.

One significant implication of this re-imagining of the university's function is that training in the arts can no longer be envisioned in craft terms. Most of the traditional academic disciplines still hold onto the guild model where you apprentice yourself in order to reproduce the guild and become a professor. I prefer to think about arts in industrial terms because it shifts the focus to questions about exchange and interaction across guilds. To think about the university as part of the industrial sector means there may be losses and risks of instrumentality, but not necessarily losses to be nostalgic about or risks to avoid. Cultural studies is positioned to imagine the university as something other than an innocent, pristine, non-instrumentalist sphere, as many narratives of the decline of the university would have it. It can trace the ways in which the university has circulated knowledge and ask: What is the knowledge industry that the university is a moment and part of?



That seems to be the central question: Will the university be able to adapt to a decentered position among these nodes of creative production, activism, and critical practice? As part of this discussion about the university as part of industrial relations, you've spoken eloquently about the intersections of cultural labor and knowledge. In *Chalk Lines* (1999) and elsewhere you write about graduate students as laborers within the university and as activists outside the university, and you've talked about how the experience of having one foot in the world of art-making and one foot in sociology, theory, and critique positioned you in terms of your practice. I'm wondering if you could talk about how this approach manifests itself within the pedagogy and curriculum design of the new graduate program.



In terms of curriculum design, we wanted to strike a balance organizationally between the rigidity of disciplinarity and the curricular blankness that tends to plague interdisciplinary humanities programs, particularly at the MA level where students can often choose to take anything from anywhere. My experience is that throwing the university at students in this way can be really disorienting, because the university doesn't organize itself in curricular terms. There are advising, access, and critical literacy issues that follow from doing interdisciplinary studies in a field or institution that's defined in disciplinary terms. You owe it to students to be able to tell them at the front end what they'll be able to access and what preparation they'll need.

One way we've tried to address that problem is to ask students to articulate as a part of the admissions process a very clear sense of a project or a place they're coming from. At the same time, we want them to be able to say: "Here's how I will let go of the project or place. Here's what I need, here's what I'm missing, here's what I lack." They need to be able to articulate both things in their admissions materials. The third thing we're asking for is a conventional research paper that allows us to assess their ability to move across a range of academically-constructed disciplinary choices.

The underlying claim we're making with respect to activism, critical politics, and the arts is that, in fact, there isn't a crisis of art or a crisis of politics. There's a crisis of evaluation. Statistically, it's hard to come up with a measure of the arts sector that sees it as being less than it once was. There's certainly more of it, and I would say the same thing of arts politics. There are more domains of human activity and expression, more objects of political contestation, than there have ever been, and there are material and institutional expressions of that proliferation, as we see in the historic growth of non-governmental organizations and the not-for-profit sector. This proliferation filters down very specifically into people's experience.

The dilemma someone making art faces today is how to elaborate the significance of their work beyond the immediate discussion of it. The Arts Politics program is meant to give them a framework to imagine what is the outside, the beyond of their work, so that they might move in those directions.



The process of learning how to explain the significance of one's work, and of finding a language and theoretical frame for what is actually emerging through the art practice itself is potentially very empowering for students. Can you talk about how this plays out pedagogically in specific courses?



We have a very specific trajectory within our curriculum, with two core courses that make the move from the conceptualization of where someone is located to the moment in which they would elaborate their work in a more expanded field. The first introduces students to the different registers of theoretical work that could begin to complicate and problematize where they are and how they think about art and culture, institutional politics, methods, and trajectories. The second required course is a seminar in arts activism that asks students to come up with a plan for intervention.

Beyond these two courses, there's an openness, with almost as many credits available outside the department as inside. We've tried to make the experience of partnership and coalition part of the curricular design. The consequence is a real burden of advising. Faculty members have to have knowledge of the university, they have to be conversant enough outside of their own school or college to be able to say, "if these are your interests, here's how you can begin to navigate the university." That in itself is an instance of arts politics, both for the individual student and for the faculty members in the program. It's what sets the program in motion.



I'm fascinated by the intent to enrich students' creative experience by providing them with tools to evaluate their work and place it in larger contexts. What you just said about faculty advising, and the knowledge it requires, is a natural bridge to asking about methods of assessment for the program itself. From a faculty member's perspective and from a student's perspectives, what does success look like?



There's no doubt that evaluation is and will be a challenge. If we're serious about taking students with these very different formations, locations, and preparations, and about giving them something of value in exchange for their tuition, then we need assessments that not only say "here's the assignment and what's expected of you," but also "here's how I evaluate you within the course of your own trajectory." This requires moving off the impersonal and transcendental model of achievement, which is quite entrenched.

When I was dean of faculty in the arts school, this same question would come up when I asked to see faculty members' syllabi and assessments. Many faculty would say, "I give a grade on the basis of talent..." I would respond, "If you believe that's true, then you're going to put yourself out of a job!" If all you can do is to claim that you know it when you see it, then the metaphysics of talent mean that you have nothing to do with it! In art and studio critiques, it's a very common rhetorical move: "Oh, yes, this really works." But the performative "it works" actually elides any discussion of what "working" means, what "its" structure or effects are, and what authority is being invoked.



In the humanities, there's a parallel investment in the concept of a cultivated and discerning "sensitivity" that also suppresses serious discussions about assessment. As a result, a concern with assessment is liable to mark one as a petty bureaucrat, a gatekeeper, a person of small focus or concern.



It's a very common formulation, though its specific terms vary across disciplines and professions. Our response has been to ask the program and the students to reflect on what it means for something to work. The challenge is to enable students to articulate the demands of sufficiency for their projects if they're to succeed, or if they're to be elaborated on their own terms. We do that by having strong mentors, by making use of relationships among projects, and by always circling back to the claims the projects make. We ask the questions, "What does this project presuppose? What are its demands of resources? How might it be evaluated on its own terms?"

In my experience, when one can allow the work of teaching evaluation to become a means of teaching the politics of judgment, then evaluation becomes something that is itself pedagogical. When I was a dean and had to address faculty concerns about the university's move to standardize teaching evaluation, I argued that the only chance we

have is to craft our own thicker, more robust version that can answer the same questions. You want the practitioners – the faculty – to be leading that process. In this context, I would say exactly the same for students. That's the responsibility of the program: to teach the students those means of evaluation.



Let me shift the focus of our conversation a bit by introducing a new term. So far, we've been talking about the framework of art-making, and the implications of that framework. Another way this conversation sometimes unfolds is through the discourse of creativity, a term that comes up frequently these days in discussions of creative classes, creative economies, creative campuses, and so on. I wonder if you could speak about some of the problems and opportunities involved in this shift from arts and arts-making to creativity.



Absolutely. A kind of false promise underlies all of those formulations: the idea that we have moved from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, from manual to mental labor. When we commit ourselves to cross-sectoral forms of arts politics, we have to be really careful about how those concepts and practices have gotten aligned with the idea of a classless society, as well as the denigration of self that comes with the conceptual move from manual to mental labor. If art is interesting, it's interesting because it refuses that distinction.

It's only in the academic credentializing of art that the division of mind and body is imposed. In the conservatory tradition, art moves from a craft apprenticeship to a discursive field called 'the arts' in which you become master, a status that allows you to work in the university. That tradition is the granddaddy of the creative class model, generalized in the hands of Richard Florida and others to the formulation of the post-industrial society. The figure of the creative person, the artistic creator, is freed from the conflicts that come from industrial society. The concept of the creative class is inserted into urban planning, where it does a lot of the same ideological work.

But there's also a longer trajectory here. The Rockefeller Fund Report that gave rise to the National Endowment for the Arts in the mid-1960s promoted public art as an answer to urban strife. It linked the arts to urban pacification. One also thinks of one of the more progressive figures and moments in the Clinton administration, Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, and his notion of the symbolic analyst as the leading force in the new knowledge economy. Before the symbolic analyst, it was the yuppie – the young, urban professional which, when you spun out the numbers, corresponded to 5% of the people who were 25 and under and working in cities in the 1980s.

Florida's celebration of the so-called "rise of the creative class" is an extension of these diverse tendencies. When you look at it closely, it is little more than a market contest in which planners and policy-makers in economically troubled urban areas compete to draw the young and the beautiful to their cities: "If you have the perfect latte, you can engender the perfect urban density." This idea of the creative class also corresponds to the humanization of managerialism that one gets in the 1980s: corporate culturalism, the reassessment of more humane approaches to management, quality circles, the enlistment of more opportunities for leisure in the workplace.

Andrew Ross's ethnographic study of labor relations in the "new economy" in *No Collar* is a wonderful account of these processes and their false promises. Remove the boundaries between work and play and you wind up working a lot more! The idea of the artisanal commitment to a craft suddenly means that labor is freed from the spatial and temporal constraints of the office. All of those false promises about the social utility of creativity are matters of concern.



Those are all really important points, but I'd like to press on something I also find troubling in this literature. Coming at this question with an interest in the potential for moving between disciplines and sectors, I'm struck by the tendency to absent artists and arts-making from the conversation. It's as if the work of creativity can be taken on by anyone. Here's this meaty, cross-sectoral conversation about creativity, but we're not going to talk with the artists, the people who have been working on how to create new stories, performances, exhibitions, music, or whatever. They're not at the table.



In terms of urban planning and redevelopment, the artist and processes of arts-making are omitted because, fundamentally, the discourse of creativity is about consumption and consumerism. Creativity is important insofar as it lends an aesthetic patina to

certain urban zones. The specificity of individual artists, the specter of labor, of making work, and of having a capacity to retain some possession of the means of production, dissemination, and distribution all fade from view. The presence of the artist's labor and capacity to organize work, to create work, and to introduce work would challenge the corporate framework in the capitalist sense and the civic sense, right?



Right. So let's connect this insight to what you were saying earlier about educating artists to understand how to elaborate the significance of their work. In this context, the discourse about creativity and urban development has some interesting implications, including possibilities for interventions in that conversation. For example, we don't just need new spaces for the arts, we also need to have artists who are capable of working to intervene in patterns of creative capitalism and gentrification. Otherwise, we risk reinscribing the inside art, outside art problem. The more tools artists have to engage with these questions from multiple directions, the better.



Yes, absolutely. When you look at the public controversies around the arts, ranging from Jesse Helms and Robert Mapplethorpe to Rudy Giuliani and the Sensation exhibit, and when you put them in a civic setting, you have to recognize that many of them are about willfully *not* seeing work. The controversies are a public performance of the disappearance of art and artists.



And they're about moving public art into debates about proprietary claims and rights. Take Richard Serra's "Tilted Arc" as an example. Who gets to say when the work is altered, where it belongs, if it can be moved - the artist, the owner, the elected official?



Yes, yes. And this allows us to do the flip that I think you're alluding to. What is so menacing about artists that you have to so studiously avoid them? How can you have this kind of marginality of the artist at the same time you have this incredible potency?



This paradox also has implications for what's happening in K-12 public education. By shutting down their arts programs, public schools are stripping kids of their right to develop their voices and to build community in diverse ways.



Absolutely. A few years ago, one of my principal forms of community-engaged work was as PTA president in my kids' school, a New York City public elementary school with an arts-based curriculum. In the context of city and state takeovers of curriculum and assessment, one of the things that strikes me is how effective an arts-based education is in helping to introduce a partition between assessment and learning. I was watching my son doing some math homework, and I asked, "How are those math problems, are they interesting to you?" He looked at me as if I was from outer space and said, "This is not math, Daddy, this is test-prep." It's clear to a third grader that test prep requires a certain set of skills, but it does not touch this other kind of critical activity where his primary commitments lie. For me, that is the most compelling part of arts education in practical terms. It's less about the skill-sets, about how good a dancer are you, and much more about the ability to narrate and imagine oneself and one's place in the world.



The idea of imagining one's place in the world leads me to one of the two final questions we wanted to pose about the sorts of lateral moves across sectors you've been describing. What have you learned about what makes these collaborations work? Which of these lessons are generalizable?



I can think of two ways to answer that question. For me, it has been interesting to think about administrative work as a domain of collaboration. I know that's a very dangerous proposition, because there are lots of reasons to worry about the instrumentalist tendencies that inform administrative intent. But if we look at the academic golden triangle of teaching, research and service, and think about service as administrative intelligence rather than just unpaid labor, then we can say that service is part of what makes collaboration possible. There's a practical moment in that formulation, one that pushes us to rethink the rational progressivism of administrative labor as a space of lateral circulation; you're in touch with other units, other faculties, other kinds of institutional commitments. There's a version of that work in the university; there's a version of it in the arts sphere; there's a version of it in any institutional site. The work begins to center on practices of assemblage, practices of the ensemble.



That's a fascinating description. You point to some of the reasons the CSPC has been deliberate in bridging some of higher education's internal labor divides, particularly between faculty and staff, but also between universities and community colleges. These bridges have been important not only because they have allowed us to access important skills, knowledges, and intelligences, but also because they extend a recognition of research and teaching activities beyond the university faculty positions that are supposed to monopolize them. And it reflects back an image of research and teaching as part of a collective or distributed network of intelligence and inquiry - as a collaborative and interdependent endeavor, not an individualized and autonomous one. It's important to an initiative like the CSPC that the knowledge network extends into and across institutions of higher education, not just outward from them.



Yes. That dynamic is also at play in a different answer to your question about practice. In addition to the PTA, my other long-term experience with collaboration is working in the editorial collective that oversees the publication of *Social Text*. I've seen it morph over twenty-odd years from an unruly collective where forty or fifty people would show up for meetings, submissions might wait a year or two before discussion, and the process for vetting them wasn't at all clear. I became a co-editor at the same moment I that became a dean, and so, for better and for worse, that was the sensibility that I applied to the position. The bureaucratic solution was to eliminate the collective vetting of submissions and to turn a collective of reviewers into a collective of writers. I wanted to rethink the nature of the work that was going to keep that collective collecting something, making use, having labor together, co-laboring.

That also could be something that's generalized. In my experience, you really have to begin by asking one critical but often overlooked question: what's the work we can do together that we can't do on our own? In the case of *Social Text*, this meant that we had to let go of one idea of the collective and to accept different sorts of administrative structures into the heart of something that might have felt better without them, in order to keep the collective form going. I'd connect the more formal domain of academia and the more informal one of the editorial collective through the question of what it means to recognize administrative work as enabling us to labor together and to perform the work of collaboration.



I agree. It's a good reminder that collective structures need to be reinvented, need to be rethought, and that this rethinking is part of the labor of collaboration.



Since we've turned to the topic of future collaborations, let me turn to the second of our two final questions. As you look towards the future, what do you see as compelling for those of us who are interested in thinking about how to develop collaborative, cross-methodological, and cross-sectoral projects in arts and culture arenas?



Well, I have a line on organization that I'm trying to promote. I want to insist upon organizing work and organizational form as part of the work we do, which is *different* than institution building. The question of the future really is tied to the question of what these sustainable forms and elements are.

Rather than following the blissful, modernist approach to the future that says let's break with history and make up something new, I would invite us to look at the history of organizational forms over the last century. Consider an amalgamation of three organizational moments. The first is the craft and professional organization; the second is the industrial organization; the third is the political party. In terms of collaborative work, I think that one has to be willing to move across those organizational domains.

For the professional craft, organization means doing administrative work, doing the work of professional organizations, taking responsibility for professional socialization, thinking about the mentoring and all the free labor that you do - whether it is helping other people get published, doing tenure reviews, all that - as a set of professional commitments and obligations one needs to invest in, if there's going to be anything like governance, but also if there's going to be anything like a reinvention of the professions themselves. This moment includes the substantial administrative labor that goes into the generation of new departments and programs like Arts Politics at NYU or Cultural Studies at UW Bothell.

The second of the three forms, the industrial organization, asks us to think about productive capacity. If we're part of the knowledge industry or, dare I say it, the creative economy, then we need to ask about the relationships between the university

and other institutional sites. For cultural studies, there are critical, strategic alliances and relationships to be built with media organizations, technology industries, a wide array of arenas in which people who work in universities are relatively insignificant. For me, this approach is much more compelling than the typical laments about commercialization of the university since most of those laments falsely cast the university as an innocent under siege, when in fact the university has always been implicated in the promotion of research agendas that work on the behalf of business and industry.

The third organizational form, the political party, names the moment when we as critical intellectuals speak with and against the state. It's one reason why issues of censorship, or academic freedom, retain their import. Here, I'd want to bring back - in the formulation of the (small c-) 'communist' party - something that's comprehensively interested in what society as a whole might look like and where we can make collective claims on the social wealth that we generate. There's a direction to that, there's an intervention, there's a comprehensiveness, and there's a set of possibilities that asks the question of how we participate in this political domain and what ideas we have about society as such. It's engaged when we, as artists and intellectuals, speak in the voice of the state and speak back to the state.

Being able to move across those three organizational forms, or moments, is not prescriptive. It doesn't mean you have to join this organization and quit that one, or that everyone should join this political party. It means thinking about the future through these historical and organizational legacies, and finding ways that our particular practices can articulate across those different moments. That would be a way in which we could deliver ourselves to a future we would want to inhabit.



And where do you see universities and other educational institutions as fitting into those discussions?



That's why issues of academic labor are so important. Labor is the thing that moves you. After all, we're talking about administrative work, we're talking about public work, we're talking about all of the things that otherwise take us outside the realm of our expertise. Ultimately, this is where we want to wrap ourselves around the idea of the creative, since this is what social creativity amounts to. It's not just about community building. It has those organizational aspects, but it also has a labor moment, and it involves a question of identity. I'm not making anything up here: I'm just giving names to what most people are doing anyways. The significance of our practice has to be elaborated beyond the sense that, oh god, I just can't serve on this committee anymore, or I'm just burnt out with this journal, or this collective is no fun anymore. If there's a syntax, a grammar to those activities and practices, then you know you're going to fill them with something else, and that the work will go on.



Well, the logical conclusion would be that we could go on for a while, and I'm sure we could. But this also might be a good moment to close. Thank you, Randy, Diane, and Kanta, for this expansive discussion.

CULTURE INDUSTRIES: CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS

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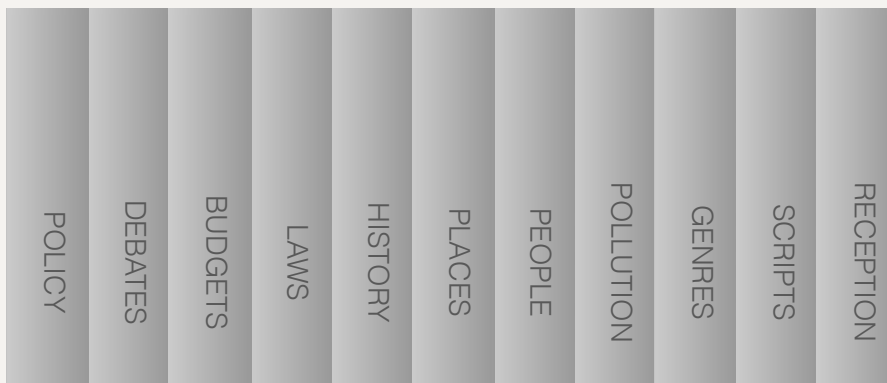
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Irresistibly enchanted by a seeming grassroots cornucopia—struck by the digital sublime—many cybertarian technophiles attribute magical properties to today's communications and cultural technologies. These beguiling toys are said to obliterate geography, sovereignty, and hierarchy in an alchemy of truth and beauty. A highly deregulated, individuated post-modern cultural world supposedly makes consumers into producers, frees the disabled from confinement, encourages new subjectivities, rewards intellect and competitiveness, links people across cultures, and allows billions of flowers to bloom in a post-political Parthenon. In this Marxist/Godardian wet dream, people fish, film, fuck, and fund from morning to midnight; the mass scale of the culture industries is overrun by consumer-led production; and wounds caused by the division of labor from the industrial age are bathed in the balm of Internet love.

True believers in technological liberation from corporate domination argue that the concept of the culture industries in particular and the categories of radical social theory, such as those of political economy, class, dialectics, emancipation, and socialism, are outmoded and need to be replaced with and displaced by novel theoretical and political perspectives, ones that are better suited to the kind of post-industrial world we live in, a world where the creative sector—among other things—is stimulated via small businesses and new machines permit person-to-person and person-to-population communication.

This thread presents a different agenda for studying culture and the culture industries in particular, one that is grounded in a distinctly cultural studies materialist reflexivity. Cultural studies is probably best understood as the politically committed, theoretically grounded, and radically self-reflexive and historical-materialist analysis of cultural processes and practices, where the commitment to imagine a humane, socialist society has always been a guiding assumption in the field from its early formations in post-war Britain. We understand Cultural Studies not just as an academic discipline, a particular approach within the wider field of the study of culture (one with implicit, but distinctive epistemological assumptions and ways of working); it is also a political project that seeks to construct what Larry Grossberg calls somewhere a "radical political history of the present."

TOWARDS A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE CULTURE INDUSTRIES: A Research Resources Guide/Chart





In line with the above commitments, this thread therefore proposes to be radically contextualist/historical, thematically internationalist, politically socialist, and methodologically and theoretically multifarious and yet robust (if you prefer rigorous) and coherent, in order to account for and engage with the specificities of the current historical conjuncture, where changes in culture are being likened to a new Industrial Revolution and the Civil and Cold Wars and are touted as a route to economic development as much as cultural and political expression. The Global North recognizes that its economic future lies in finance capital and ideology rather than agriculture and manufacturing, and the Global South, too, is seeking revenue from intellectual property to supplement its minerals and masses.

The US, for instance, sells feelings, ideas, money, health, insurance, and law—niche forms of identity, AKA culture. The trend is to harness the cultural skills of the population to replace lost agricultural and manufacturing employment with jobs in music, theatre, animation, recording, radio, TV, architecture, software, design, toys, books, heritage, tourism, advertising, the web, fashion, crafts, photography, gaming, and cinema. Between 1980 and 1998, annual world exchange of electronic culture grew from US\$95 billion to US\$388 billion. PriceWaterhouseCoopers estimates that the US culture industries generated US\$428 billion in 2009, putting them ahead of aerospace, automobiles, and agriculture in monetary value. They boast an expected compound annual growth rate of 3.8% through 2014. In 2003, culture accounted for 2.3% of Gross Domestic Product across Europe, to the tune of €654 billion—more than real estate or food and drink, and equal to chemicals, plastics, and rubber. Annual global growth of 10% is predicted (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2010; Miller, 2009).

Those of us in Cultural Studies need to be experts in such matters. The revelation that 'popular culture [is] wonderful! It's so *complicated*; (Alvarado and Thompson, 1990) shouldn't impress us. The noted playwright David Edgar has mused pointedly on a neoliberal drift among culturalists:

[I]t is one of the great ironies of the project to challenge cultural paternalism and celebrate audience diversity that by undermining one bit of the ruling class, it appeared to endorse the ambitions of another. Thus did post-Marxist academia give a progressive seal of approval to letting the multicultural market rip; ... if the ultimate socialist institution is the post office, then postmodernism and poststructuralism have persuaded post-socialists to abandon playing post offices and take up playing shop (2000).

Ideas have to be concrete to make a mark on our thread, whose market and non-market principles will derive, inter alia, from the French Revolutionary cry '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*' [liberty, equality, solidarity] and the Argentine left's contemporary version '*ser ciudadano, tener trabajo, y ser alfabetizado*' [citizenship, employment, and literacy] (Martín-Barbero, 2001). The first category concerned political rights; the second, material interests; and the third, cultural representation (Rawls, 1971). Far from centralized state control constraining choice by people, we make the point that choice is generally constrained by centralized commercial control. The marginal propensity to consume is very marginal indeed for the vast majority.

This perspective connects to a skepticism about fetishizing the autonomy of style and fun from corporate and state power and their putative capacity to undermine social relations through spectacle while failing to 'contest and transform the dominant cultural, social, economic, political and linguistic formations' (Alvarado, 1981) because they ignore policies, programs and

other organizational resources for combating 'a class stratified, sexist, racist, and ageist social formation' (Alvarado and Ferguson, 1983).

So how do we to study the culture industries? And what kind of methodological and epistemological assumptions should inform our analyses? There may appear to be resonances between comprehensive studies of how texts are made and produced, how they signify, and how they are understood (for instance, Tulloch and Alvarado, 1983) and communications studies' sender-message-receiver model (Weaver and Shannon, 1963). But whereas the latter accords coeval status to the three points of the chain in a pragmatic quest for the best means of getting one's point across, we favor a much more radical position than this separation of production, meaning, and circulation allows. These processes, and knowledge of them, are interdependent, complicit parts of a political system, of a social whole. Far from being neutral, separate elements of a conveyor belt, they are mutually inscribed within each other's meanings.

Our analyses must therefore juggle multiple determinations and overdeterminations and keep the interrelationships of state, capital, pedagogy, ideology and discourse in tension, working with the recognition that ''ideology' is not an entity which can or cannot be disseminated through a medium, for that medium is itself part of an ideology' rather than 'a transparent channel through which meanings pass' (Alvarado, 1981). They seek a serious engagement with the kinds of cultural studies work that would make the connections between the production of meanings and subjectivities and the production of commodities, as well as examine the processes of determination amongst and between different levels of production. This means the rejection of the notion of autonomy (relative or not), and the recognition that cultural phenomenon, far from being autonomous texts and practices, are caught in what one might call a logic of interconnectedness of the different social levels. According to this logic, the significance of a cultural event or phenomenon—be it ideological, political, economic, or cultural—cannot be properly assessed outside a dialectical understanding of its place in society as a whole. We must learn to examine the cultural industries in the context of their social whole (which, here, refers to the concrete unity of all interacting spheres of social life under capitalism), that is, by pursuing their hidden interactions and interconnections in real life. This way we are in a better position to understand how social, economic, and political forces act on cultural production, distribution, and reception; and how cultural forces, in turn, act on the social, economic, and political.

But we do not stop here. We concur with Raymond Williams that pursuing and revealing the hidden interconnections and interactions between the economic, political, cultural and ideological is only part of the work that needs to be done and insist with him on the need to establish "the real order of determination between different kinds of activity [and levels]. That there always is such an order of determination cannot be doubted, from the historical evidence, though that it is not always the same order is equally clear. This is the necessary, theoretical base for the recognition of genuinely different social orders" (15).

Nor do we favor the reduction of culture to hermeneutic interpretation. Literary studies, for example, largely neglects 'the production, circulation and reading of texts ... the organization, ownership and interrelationships of the various publishing houses ... book advertising and the retail distribution system ... and the interrelationship between authorship, ownership and copyright' (Alvarado, 1981).

Consider television's duality, its Janus-faced capacity to witness and embody capitalism's paradoxical desire for publicity and secrecy, marketing and privacy. TV is open as a set of cultural texts, genres, and channels—but closed as a set of political-economic interests, methods, and commitments. Since the 1980s, in many parts of the world, television has opened up to the point where it now appears to welcome researchers, provided that they buy into its *faux* responsiveness to commodified audience reactions. This development has led a sizeable cohort of the credulous to swallow the Kool-Aid dispensed by mid-level media executives who just love to

expose themselves; hence Bart Beaty's telling remark that 'media studies has found its objects of study ... dictated by *Entertainment Weekly*' (2009).

So our thread will be very different from today's return to aesthetic criticism based on interpretation and identity, as per much of media and cultural studies; scientistic service to militarism, business, policing, and the professions (q.v. communication studies); and the neoliberal embrace of bourgeois economics undertaken by prelates of the creative industries.

In this thread, we also realize that traditional disciplinary methods, approaches and strategies have their merits and limits, but that they work better when they are deployed together in the analysis of cultural phenomena and processes, and in this case of the culture industries. No single method is complete; and to get as close as possible to a better and more complex understanding of the cultural and media industries, combining methods becomes indispensable. As Johnson and company put it, "a multiplicity of methods is necessary because no one method is intrinsically superior to the rest and each provides a more or less appropriate way of exploring some different aspect of cultural process" (Johnson et al. 42). And it is in this nuanced sense that our thread also seeks to be interdisciplinary and multi-perspectival.

So here is an invitation: if your background is in the social sciences, try moving beyond your own experiences and methods to look at what history and textual analysis have to say. If you come from the humanities, take a peek at the law and content analysis. If you're an ethnographer, try out uses and gratifications and effects studies. If you're an audience researcher, see what political economy and environmental science have to say. If you generally work alone, try teamwork. If you only read scholarly and primary materials in one language, learn another and work with native speakers. If your thing is drama, try covering politics, and *vice versa*.

This thread calls for a radical contextualization that acknowledges the shifts and shocks that characterize the existence of institutions and texts: their ongoing renewal as the temporary property of productive workers and publics, and their stasis as the abiding property of unproductive businesspeople. It must combine political economy, ethnography, and textual analysis. A model derives from Roger Chartier's tripartite historicization of books. He aims to reconstruct 'the diversity of older readings from their sparse and multiple traces,' focusing on 'the text itself, the object that conveys it, and the act that grasps it,' and identifying 'the strategies by which authors and publishers tried to impose an orthodoxy or a prescribed reading' of it (1989: 157, 161-63, 166). That grid turns away from reflectionist arguments that a text's key meaning lies in its overt or covert capacity to capture the *Zeitgeist*, and rejects formalism's claim that close readings of sound and image can secure definitive meanings, because texts accrete and attenuate meanings on their travels as they rub up against, trope, and are troped by other fictional and social texts and interpreted (Attallah, 2007). At the same time, we need to comprehend that culture is nested within 'corporations, advertising, government, subsidies, corruption, financial speculation, and oligopoly' (McChesney 2009: 109). As an example, the international transfer of texts needs to address sites (from trade conventions to small meetings); business models; industry actors (from independent or studio producers to buyers); texts themselves; and such contextual features as audiences, legal frameworks, and economies (Bielby and Harrington 2008: 47).

That approach fruitfully connects text to performance, in what Ian Hunter calls an 'occasion ... the practical circumstances governing the composition and reception of a piece' (1988: 215). Those circumstances may reflect, refract, or ignore social tendencies. Texts exist within a multi-form network of commercial-free and commercial-driven TV, video, CD-ROMs, the Web, DVDs, electronic games, telephones, radio, libraries, books, and multiplexes. Engagements with audiences and texts must now be supplemented by an account of the conditions under which these materials are made, circulated, received, interpreted, and criticized.

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"NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY:" LABOR, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE BIRMINGHAM LEGACY OF THE CULTURE INDUSTRIES DEBATE

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I am a US citizen. I live in a sick, nay dying society. I'm not sure if the society itself knows it is dying, or if it has simply resigned itself to its passing, watching as the zombie economy of the past thirty years greedily slurps the last of its vitality. Arguing capitalism, and its so-called creative destruction, is a force of nature, its elites sit back and recite Robert Frost: "Nothing gold can stay" - except, of course, for the piles of gold they've extracted from that society in the process of destroying it. That gold must stay - right in the coffers of their foreign bank accounts where it belongs. This is no paradox when the goal of the last thirty years or so has been the restoration of their power, their control over the levers of economic discipline such that they could force the rest of us to do their bidding with the apolitical hand of the market. [1] Those who look at the crisis and claim capitalism is broken or unbalanced foolishly assume that this isn't exactly what capitalism was designed to do. They're wrong; it isn't; this is capitalism unleashed, as Andrew Glyn put it before his untimely passing. [2]

But you know that. Or you should. All Cultural Studies scholars should know this and most are probably tired of hearing it. Likewise, you know that, parallel with this development, a dynamic wave of social, political, and material technology has unleashed the immaterial, creative, cultural economy of the commons - exciting developments that seem to confirm all we originally thought about how culture, ideology, and audiences work. Meanwhile, the industries where this work is rewarded with things like wages and benefits have become all the more adept at skimming what rewards exist for itself and its high level executives. They may lose skirmishes over IPR or market share to forms of piracy, but ultimately the people who do the creative labor in western culture, the crowdsourced, social marketed, micro-economic labor, are no more able to pay for their rent, their food, and their debt. [3] Not that this keeps industry insiders from advocating restrictive possibly apocalyptic policies like the SOPA bill or ACTA.

Yet, still, in parks around the country, there are glimmers of hope. The incredible spread of Occupy Wall Street has surprised all of us. This renewed energy, reminiscent of 1968 - or even 1849 - has shifted the national conversation leftward, with issues of class, education, labor, inequality, and the sustainability of capitalism suddenly on the lips of TV news commentators. While the organizing principles (and principals) have been decidedly anarchistic, the issues that seem to be at the heart of the movement intersect distinctively with the intellectual lineage of Cultural Studies. Below, I'll catalog some of this lineage, drawing upon the early theoretical and strategic frameworks of the New Left laid out by Stuart Hall as the founding editor of the *New Left Review* - theoretical positions which, as Dennis Dworkin convincingly demonstrates, can be seen as the genetic materials of the Birmingham School to come. [4]

On the other hand, these recent events create some welcome tension around some of the anarchist and autonomist tendencies that have so completely infused most Cultural Studies oriented discussions of economics, labor, and the culture industry. As Stefano Harney insightfully points out in his intervention on the "Creative Industries Debate," there is a typological similarity between the conceptions of Italian Autonomist Marxists like Lazzarato and those of Stuart Hall and the early Birmingham School.

Again it was cultural studies that first helped us to focus on this idea of an unfinished commodity and its labour process because it was cultural studies that first introduced the idea of a commodity that could be coded and recoded by those who take it up, and it is cultural studies that located this process of unfinishing the commodity (and the subject) in society at large, in the social factory and not in the workplace. It is also cultural studies that first gives us a sense of the magnitude of this social factory, and consequently of the magnitude of the work going on in this social factory. This post-workerist idea of the social factory – of the realms of social reproduction coming under the searchlight of paid work without penetrating all the shadows of unpaid work that remains in those realms – is thus first posited by Italian Marxism, but first felt, explored, lived by British cultural studies. [5]

Harney is interested in answering a specific question, posed by Toby Miller in response to Daniel Mato. Mato claims that, because of the broad work of signification done by commodities of all kinds, thinking of all industries as cultural makes a great deal of sense. Harney, paraphrasing Miller's response, finds it roughly corresponds to the emergence of new forms of labor and especially management that can be explained by Italian autonomist notion of the social factory. He provides a helpful overview of the way that contemporary management literature itself is taking up the notion of creativity as a product in and of itself: "Now it is not just that creativity is required to manage the worker, or even that creativity is required to innovate the product, but that creativity is the end, not just the means, of the labor process." [6]

In short, Harney's answer to the question of "why now" is that the capitalist organization of the labor process has only recently caught up to the understanding of the production of cultural value that the Birmingham School outlined in relation to the culture industries debates several decades ago. I fully concur with this assessment and think it an important contribution to our understanding of both of culture industries themselves, and of the lineage of Cultural Studies as an academic enterprise. But I want to press on a different portion of this narrative and ask, "why then?"

When the CCCS was founded, the culture industry looked incredibly different so it is strange that we should find theories about those industries suddenly more applicable to today's configuration of forces. Moreover, the very limited focus of the culture industries as engines of ideology was famously critiqued by Dallas Smythe as a central blindspot in Western Marxism, going back to Adorno. [7] Yet it made sense at the time if we understand the project of Birmingham, the project of the New Left, and the way both conceptualized the relationship between the welfare state, the economic mode of production, the ideology producing culture industries, and the social relations on the ground. Both projects had the objective of finding a new lever of social and cultural change in the absence of either the material degradation of unhinged capitalism (i.e. class- led revolution) or the potential utopian or populist vitality of avant-garde culture. In other words, Cultural Studies' discourse of the culture industry emerges from a certain material and social context, where the state, economy, and culture existed in an unprecedented arrangement. What is, perhaps, most interesting in the present day relevance of this culture industry discourse is the way that all of these relations have changed.

Over the course of the last 150 years or so, we can see three distinct phases of the culture industry. More specifically, there have been (at least) three eras marked by different configurations of the relationship between culture, politics, the dominant mode of production and the commodification of culture. In terms of the culture industry per se, Lawrence Lessig proffers a useful distinction in his book *Remix*. He describes a pendulum between what he calls "read only" and "read/write" culture, using the now almost ancient distinction between recordable consumer DVD and CDs. [8] In the pre-recorded culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, culture itself was predominantly R/W in the sense that much of the

culture out there was available for creative re-use by everyday citizens. All music was potentially folk music; all literature potentially open to local (and even reactionary) interpretation. [9] This open, dynamic form of cultural production was undermined, in Lessig's interpretation, by the advent of recorded culture. In this second stage, culture became read only because the technology of production and distribution were monopolized by large, corporate entities.

Cultural Studies emerged from the second era, whose contours I'll explore below; and we are now in a liminal phase brought on by the uncertain conflagration between the neoliberal beast, the convergence culture that has ever so briefly slipped from its slimy paws, and the nascent popular uprisings under the banner (and hash-tag) #occupyeverywhere. This third phase, or conjuncture, once again reconfigures these relations, making it important to revise the theoretical assumptions and political strategies that were adhered to in an earlier era of "the culture industry." In some ways, the culture industry has replaced all other industries; but this shouldn't give us the illusion that the traditional politics of the left can be abandoned and the struggle given over to the precarious multitude of immaterial labor. In order to outline what I mean by this, it is important to discuss the characteristics of each of these conjunctures. After returning to this, I will outline the direction I think this points to both in our understanding of the culture industries and in terms of political and theoretical strategy going forward.

In the first phase, as mentioned above, culture itself was relatively small and local; unrecorded folk and avant-garde elite; a source of resistance and pleasure in a society where needs and desires were increasingly fulfilled by commodities. Michael Denning argues that this material circumstance explains the modern meaning of the word "culture:"

Culture, one might say, emerges only under capitalism. Though there appears [in the works of 19th century writers] to be a culture in precapitalist societies, the concept is invented by Tylorians and Arnoldians alike to name those places where the commodity does not yet rule: the arts, leisure, and unproductive luxury consumption of revenues by the accumulators; and the ways of life of so-called primitive peoples. The world dominated by capital - the working day, the labor process, the factory and office, machines and technology and science itself - is thus outside of culture. [10]

The seemingly local or suddenly, mercurial, transnational culture complemented an equally precarious employment situation (due to the scientific labor management of the second industrial revolution in the US). But it was also one in which organized labor quickly tested its legs and fought tooth and nail for its rights. In the US, this was true even for decades after the Supreme Court had made government workplace regulation practically unconstitutional (*Lochner* vs. *New York*, 1905) and it continued well into the most severe economic contraction (till now) in that country's history. As Mike Davis observes, the most numerous labor protests in the history of the US occurred at the height of the Great Depression, in 1936-7 - arguably leading to FDR threat to pack the Supreme Court with another 6 justices in order to get a ruling favorable to his economic plans. [11]

This potential opposition of culture to capitalism - the fact of a potential space where the relation of capital and commodity did not reign, reified, complete - gave hope to the Marxian inspired critics of the early Western Marxist tradition (and led them to despair when it appeared culture itself would suffer the same fate as everything else in industrial capitalism.) [12] This lament of the colonization of culture by industry should be contextualized in relation to the orthodox Marxist lament of the dissipation of popular struggle by the integration of labor and management via what fellow critical theorist Fredrick Pollock referred to as "State Capitalism." [13]

It is therefore hard to parse the next stage, to separate the material and economic changes from the cultural, social and political; but the role of the cultural industries were indeed pivotal, in much the way that the Frankfurt School believed, though with important differences. Whatever ideological effect mass culture had on society, it was always secondary to the ideological effect of the apparent tilt (for white folks, anyway) towards a more equitable society. In parallel with the culture industry's colonization of the sphere of potential avant-garde resistance, labor organizations were recognized in collective bargaining agreements, removing the possibility of the sit down strike from workers on the line. But there were workers on the line, and, their power in the system of production recognized, they were given better wages and benefits and a more secure social safety net, funded by extremely progressive taxation. [14] In 1944, the top marginal tax rate in the US was 94%. This wasn't reduced until 1964, when it became 77%. Our current (2011) top rate is less than half that: 35%. Unemployment insurance, Social Security and financial arrangements that made it possible (and even patriotic) to fund the suburban, car-driving, air-conditioned lifestyle with a reasonable dose of government-backed consumer debt.

Most striking for people at the time was not the increased possibility of middle-class prosperity, but the sudden reduction of working class misery. In a contemporary account (1960), Dorothy Thompson frames her critique of welfare capitalism with the following admission:

There is no doubt that—throughout Western Europe at any rate—the combined forces of economic stability, the high level of employment, the consolidation in certain important sectors of working-class power and influence, have, in the last fifteen years, raised the overall living standards of all sections of the people. Fifteen years is a short time, and it is hardly surprising that many people have been overwhelmed by the speed of the change. The most striking thing, for the older generations, has been the apparent abolition of poverty. They can still remember times when a skilled man in full employment could barely manage to raise a family decently, when no job was secure, when working-class children had to turn down grammar school scholarships because their parents could not afford the clothes to send them to school. These things were the rule, not the exception, and the comparison with the position of the skilled worker and his family today needs no labouing. [15]

Surely countless mainstream commentators made similar, likely more effusive observations, but in the pages of *New Left Review* the radical economist Joan Robinson corroborates Thompson's account, saying,

Since the war, statistical unemployment has barely touched 2 per cent. Whatever our present discontents, this is by no means to be despised. The worst part of heavy unemployment was not the waste of potential wealth (and, as we shall argue in a moment, its removal has not been achieved mainly by avoiding waste) but the rotting of individual lives, the damaged self-respect, the desperate egoism and cringing fear on one side and the smug self-deception on the other. Certainly we live now in a cleaner, more human country. But however thankful we should be for these blessings, it is too soon to claim that full employment vindicates latter-day capitalism. [16]

Aside from the foreboding sense of what awaits western society as this Fordist exception expires ("the rotting of individual lives"), these accounts seem to demonstrate a ground truth of that era: no matter how many episodes of Ozzie and Harriet one watched, it was the way these cultural objects reinforced what appeared to be the dominant - or emergent - material possibilities that made them so powerful. [17]

This gives a new meaning to Daniel Mato's declaration that "all industries are cultural." [18] Miller's nuanced critique aside, Mato's realization that that "all industries and forms of consumption are cultural," is empirically substantiated by both the spatio-temporal limits of

the postwar regime and the depths to which it transformed consciousness even before the specifically cultural components of the legitimating apparatus itself was specifically industrialized. Still, the practice of purchasing recorded trinkets of culture from media corporations became dominant, altering our basic relation with culture and leading Denning to claim:

The postmodern concept of culture was the result of the generalization of the commodity form throughout the realm the moderns had called culture. [. . .] Far from marking the places outside capital's empire, culture was itself an economic realm, encompassing the mass media, advertising, and the production and distribution of knowledge. Moreover, it came to signify not only the cultural industries and state cultural apparatuses, but the forms of working-class subsistence and consumption, both the goods and services supplied by the welfare state or purchased in the market, and the time of leisure and social reproduction outside the working day. [19]

It was in this second, more reified stage of the culture industry that Cultural Studies emerged in the UK. On the one side, the capitalist bargain struck with labor and the welfare state muffled the energy of class struggle; on the other, the dizzying flood of newly industrialized popular culture lacked a coherent critical complement.

By Stuart Hall's own admission, from within this affluent society the puzzle the New Left set out to solve was how, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "to bring the moment to a crisis." The British variant was less assured of the welfare state's destruction of what C. W. Mills later called the "labor metaphysic;" [20] still the goals and process Hall, Thompson, Williams and others in the British Cultural Studies lineage relied upon demonstrate at best an ambivalence about the role of structural economic forces and relations of production in producing an opening for further political development. In a pointed reminiscence of this period, reprinted in *New Left Review's* 50th anniversary issue, Hall splits hairs on the role of the current economic changes to class and consciousness. He says the editorial position of *NLR* was neither the assertion that nothing had changed (it was still capitalism, after all) characteristic of the Old Left, nor the mainstream sense that the "post-war consensus [...] had led to an erosion of traditional class cultures and the 'embourgeoisement' of the working class." [21]

We also challenged the prevailing view that the so-called affluent society would of itself erode the appeal of socialist propaganda—that socialism could arise only out of immiseration and degradation. Our emphasis on people taking action for themselves, 'building socialism from below' and 'in the here and now', not waiting for some abstract Revolution to transform everything in the twinkling of an eye, proved, in the light of the re-emergence of these themes after 1968, strikingly prefigurative.

As he says elsewhere in the article, "socialism was a conscious democratic movement and socialists were made, not born or given by the inevitable laws of history or the objective processes of the mode of production alone." In effect it wasn't really a denial of either of the above propositions: the question was more of how to convince an "embourgeoisied" working class that nothing significant had changed, even as contemporary "postmodern" cultural circumstances necessitated alternative and innovative forms of analysis. Within cultural studies, we are vastly more familiar with the latter innovations in analysis than the political processes meant to enable the former.

Hall's use of the term "prefigurative" points to the organizational similarity between the political strategy of the early *New Left Review* and present day, anarchist-inspired Occupy Wall Street movement: [22] namely, the creation of *New Left Review* reading clubs across the UK. In the article above, outlining his recollection of the New Left, Hall writes of the project of creating *NLR* clubs around Britain in order to engage people "where they were" and get conversations going about socialism. They weren't alone, of course, in doing this and it's not

entirely contextualized, but there is a real attention to politically engaging "the people" and getting them interested in these ideas and their importance for social change. As with the General Assembly of the various iterations of #Occupy, in practice, this meant opening the conversations broadly, in local communities, and getting people engaged in the discussion rather than giving a top-down proscription of what the discussion should look like – or such was Hall's ideal. In the absence, in other words, of a R/W realm of culture in the culture industry, the New Left would try to supplement the popular dearth of social democracy by bringing its practice to the people.

While he draws a distinction between himself and Thompson earlier in the essay, by the end it is clear that, in terms of how he understood socialist activism at the time, he remained deeply inspired by Thompson's work on William Morris (presaging his arguments in *Making of the Working Class*). To demonstrate this, Hall quotes from his editorial in the first issue of NLR:

We have to go into towns and cities, universities and technical colleges, youth clubs and Trade Union branches and—as Morris said—make socialists there. We have come through 200 years of capitalism and 100 years of imperialism. Why should people—naturally—turn to socialism? There is no law which says that the Labour Movement, like a great inhuman engine, is going to throb its way into socialism or that we can, any longer . . . rely upon poverty and exploitation to drive people, like blind animals, towards socialism. Socialism is, and will remain, an active faith in a new society, to which we turn as conscious, thinking human beings. People have to be confronted with experience, called to the 'society of equals', not because they have never had it so bad, but because the 'society of equals' is better than the best soft-selling consumer capitalist society, and life is something lived, not something one passes through like tea through a strainer.

Two things are evident in this – as in the rest of the essay – which gives what I think is great insight into what the Thompson and Hall agreed on in this movement. One is that they are connecting their struggle to a much longer one (interpreted through the lens of Thompson's historical account of Morris). And in so doing they prized the democratic process of "populist" discussion above having a clear set of political and theoretical principles that they would address to the people. According to Hall, it was actually the inability to operate a journal in this context – "the editorial board the fear that a journal of ideas could not be effectively run by committees" – which ultimately led him to resign as editor. I will return to this process oriented politics below.

This is a telling foible of Hall's – though perhaps one of the more forgivable ones: namely that he prized (or, more importantly, wanted to appear to prize) process over the content of the ideas. At the time, this was a very sensible principle (as he demonstrates by contextualizing it in relation to the left factions vying for control over the dominant narrative.) However, as time went on, it seems to have become a serious liability. His discussion of the CND campaign and the way it became an articulated struggle spanning lines of class and social status is obviously included as a nod to – if not refracted as a memory through – the more prominent understanding of socialist politics adopted at the time he was writing (in 1988) Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. [23]

But equally visible is the reason behind two dominant paradigms that emerge from this moment. [24] On the one hand, the socialist humanism of Thompson; on the other, the theoretical anti-humanism of Althusser. They are rightly seen as being opposed in discussions of the New Left and nascent Cultural Studies, but they are clearly of a piece with their historical moment. Both take the economic consensus and the political domination of the welfare state for granted in their framing of the role culture – dominated as it was by the "read only" cultural industries – played in cementing (or potentially overturning) that consensus. [25]

In Hall's description of the need for a new approach at the time, he notes the importance of socialist humanism and the need to examine the role that culture was playing in keeping people from thinking about the problems of capitalism. [26]

The purpose of discussing the cinema or teen-age culture in NLR is not to show that, in some modish way, we are keeping up with the times. These are directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism—the growing points of social discontent, the projections of deeply-felt needs. Our experience of life today is so extraordinarily fragmented. The task of socialism is to meet people where they are, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated—to develop discontent and, at the same time, to give the socialist movement some direct sense of the times and ways in which we live.

Alienation – the quintessential Marxist humanist concept of the *Manuscripts* – became a good way of framing this; the emphasis on "directly living" one's conditions and being active in their creation is the strategy that Thompson recommended for getting people active again. The importance of alienation as a political concept therefore becomes paramount as a political strategy in a time when the working class had won a significant share of the economic pie, but had stopped far short of worker control.

The key appeal of the socialist front had to be the resurrection of some primal sense of anomie at how, despite material comfort, there was less control over the realm representations and less creativity possible both there and in the workplace (hence the importance of *Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital* to the early Birmingham School. [27]) Alienation, in this regard, was a strategically chosen line of critique, admittedly elaborated most fully in the line of the Post-Frankfurt School critic Herbert Marcuse. [28] And, to be sure, much of this was already prefigured (though in much more dour German tones) in the interwar Frankfurt School critique of the culture industry and state capitalism – if not in Lukacs even earlier descriptions in *History and Class Consciousness*. [29] Looking back on this from a post-2008 perspective, it is hard to see alienation looming as large as the "rotting of individual lives" in our future theory; yet it is easy to see why it held prime space in the plumbing socialism of the time.

Though a full accounting of Althusser is beyond my purview here, on the basics he agreed. True, he was focused less on the stimulation of agency and more on the rigorous elaboration of a theoretical paradigm fit for this new age. The malleability of his system is demonstrated by its elaboration by Hall and others in the 1970s Birmingham School, his near contemporary Poulantzas and later by those Alain Lipietz termed the "Rebel Sons of Althusser" in the Regulationist School of economic theory. [30] While proving it would require a much longer demonstration, I would assert that he was not all that inspired by the possibility that the security of economic realm would ever be undermined again – that class consciousness per se would not become prominent because of a direct material change in circumstances. Unlike the Regulationists, whose model relies upon the ideological power of the economic system itself, there is a remoteness of the economy's power (only in the last instance) within Althusser's descriptions – though it was still too close for the critics of economism – shifted the focus to the way the political and cultural realms were able to secure and reproduce the system despite the remaining inequality and oppression at its heart. The dominant iteration of his abstract model, so to speak, was caste with a certain concrete social formation in mind.

Each of these paradigms is founded on the presumption that the political economic system will remain as it was. The state would remain as an organ of control over the economy, making the Gramscian concept of hegemony essential to the overall strategy – and the cultural realm a key target for undermining the current reproduction. As I said above, this produces a variety of distinctions around their impressions of the culture industry, political and theoretical strategies. But they both fundamentally agree that class as a directly experienced difference in

relation to either the mode of production or the realities of distribution and opportunity would, for the foreseeable future, be increasingly less salient than people's feeling of alienation in relation to "the spectacle."

Thus it is clearer why the Birmingham School took their particular tack to the culture industry at the time. Harney, in his summary of their approach, notes that they were focused largely on three elements. First, the ground level, almost ethnographic focus on everyday life, or what he calls "the massive daily activity in populations." While Harney sees in this a nascent economic realization ("Cultural studies gave us a sense of the vast wealth at stake, of the value latent in popular culture, a value that would soon be realized in the creative industries") Hall and others at the time were interested in this as a political concern: seeing this massive daily activity, making it visible and notable, was a way of publicizing the continued vitality of the popular mind beneath what scholars saw as the stifling alienation of industrial (and industrialized) culture.

The same concern animated the other components identified by Harney. He points to their "politics of consumption" and "politics of distribution" as indicative of their prescient ability to "grasp [that] the expansion in circulation of cultural forms appeared to create new value everywhere." Retrospectively, Harney is clearly correct in this assessment, but it is important, again, to note why these intellectual tacks were taken. On the one hand, it is a direct result of the assumption - and largely the material reality - that people could not participate in the culture industries themselves. The uniquely dominant "read only" culture industry of the time prevented them from creating broadly distributed alternative or oppositional forms of culture. This left them to consider the continuing vitality of politics at the point of consumption and the subcultural spaces that made this possible. In other words, while the current mode of production makes these spaces obvious sources of cognitive, immaterial economic value, for Birmingham they were potential sources of political power. [31]

Harney signals this when he mentions cultural studies has been lately caricatured for looking to these areas and practices as zones of potential resistance. But it is more important to remind ourselves of why they were looking there instead of elsewhere. Again, Harney hints at this when he says, "Some of this emphasis on circulation and consumption was intended to blunt the productivist tendencies cultural studies encountered on the Left." [32] While I can't give a complete philology of the term, productivist, the key lineage Harney draws upon here is that, again, of the autonomist Marxists. As Gill and Pratt describe it,

Autonomist writers are critical of some Marxists for their failure to appreciate the significance of work as constitutive of social life, and for their tendency to romanticize labour. Negri notes that it is sometimes treated as if it were 'a title of nobility' rather than the central mechanism of capitalist domination. He indicts other socialists for their commitment to 'productivism', seeing it both as a retreat from critical analysis and from utopian imagination. [33]

Harney walks a tight line here between the ideas of Birmingham and those of Turin, but the distinctions between the two are revelatory. For our purposes here, it is important to specify that Hall was likely less taken with the more utopian, Spinozan line of the Autonomists, particularly those refracted through the Foucauldian lens of Hardt and Negri. Clearly people like Thompson were interested in something like the production of subjectivities through the labor process - and his later work likely inspired Hall in some way. [34] But the Spinozan form of class struggle was barely nascent at the time. We can say that Hall and Birmingham were responding to productivist pressure from the left for our purposes, if we mean that, unlike orthodox Marxists, they saw the labor process as being an unlikely source for resistance in their contemporary era.

As Chris Maisano has recently pointed out in relation to Mills own ambivalence on working class activism, the dominant New Left focus on cultural and intellectual proxies was not just a theoretical error: it seemed completely disconnected from the actual events going on at the time:

Most importantly, the theoretical premise that underpins Mills' rejection of the working class is deeply flawed. As noted above, he argued that organized workers could be a decisive force only during the beginning stages of industrialization or under conditions of political autocracy and repression. The historical record does not bear this argument out. It does not hold when considering workers' movements around the turn of the 20th century, and it has even less explanatory power when we look at the 1960s and 1970s. An unprecedented strike wave hit the U.S. and Western Europe in this period. In 1970, there were over 5,700 strikes in the U.S. involving over 3 million workers, and radical rank-and-file caucuses challenging conservative union bureaucracies in addition to the bosses sprung up in a number of major unions. In Italy, the 1969-1970 "Hot Autumn" strike wave was the biggest and longest in history. These events undermined the New Left thesis that the welfare state bought off the working class and undermined its traditional role as the leading force for radical social change. Indeed, through full or near-full employment and social policies that provided a measure of income support and social security for working people, it helped to encourage such action. [35]

On the other hand, it is worth noting that some of the first studies of the Culture Industry in the Cultural Studies orbit were focused on the way these and other labor disputes were being portrayed in the press. The main topic of the Glasgow Media Group's *Bad News* was the way the televisual medium managed to distort labor issues in the interest of the dominant hegemonic order - a topic that Hartley returns to throughout his work and even figures in Fiske's *Television Culture*. [36] The issue for these studies was less an early iteration of Thomas Frank's reductive thesis in *What's the Matter with Kansas?* and more a question of why labor issues, which were of potentially wide interest, were not gaining traction in the national conversation. [37]

And, for another turn of the screw, despite the relative silence by Birmingham School scholars of these events, they figure centrally into those theories of labor Harney sees as parallel. Not only were the events of the "Hot Autumn" constitutive of the autonomist legacy, but both they and the strike waves in the US were founded on a somewhat common philosophy. As May paraphrases Tronti,

The point to emphasize is that for the working class to confront its own labor as capital it must reject those institutions which valorize labor inasmuch as that labor is capital, namely, the institutional labor movement - for the institutions and norms of business unionism are designed precisely to manage industrial conflict and discipline the materializations of working bodies. A contract, to provide only one example, usually concedes management decisions to the boss and legally binds workers to no-strike agreements. [38]

The strikes of Turin and throughout the US were unique in being wildcat strikes, "Often," in the words of Cal Winslow, "repudiations of the union leadership and, implicitly, of the entire postwar system of industrial relations." [39] While this doesn't vindicate the Birmingham assumptions (anymore than it makes them identical to those of the Autonomists) it does validate their belief that change would be unlikely from within the institutions of that system of industrial relations. And this, to return to the overarching theme, explains the particular emphasis they placed on the culture industry and the remaining potential for resistance in relation to the products it distributed.

Now we exist in some Frankenstein of a third stage. Periodization is perilous work. Analytical distinctions are always messy and subject to contention. More importantly for these purposes, I shudder to think of how readers will react if I subject them to another account of the origins and spread of neoliberalism as an economic utopia of upper class reactionaries. It is clear from the economic data, that neoliberalism is not all that dynamic as an economic model per se, nor is its rhetorical shift of emphasis away from the state and towards markets an accurate representation of reality. Markets have become more powerful, but only through the now ex-nominated force of the neoliberal state. [40] This creates an amazing channel for redistributing income upward and allows the movement of capital to take place on a global scale. [41] Boosters of this transformation - as far back as Daniel Bell and the Tofflers - have long assumed (though without saying it) that the imperial dominance of the US will secure a healthy future for those who buy into the promises of the New Economy. It is amazing that though this myth has become as an organizing principle of our political, cultural and social life, the latest permutations of its promises still enchant and entice us: their novelty, it appears, never wears off, no matter how much tarnish it accumulates. Though most of us lost out on the last round of deindustrialization and financialization, with the right education and well-oiled bootstraps, this next turn will be different. [42]

Hall and company presided over the initial elements of the ideological parry legitimating this transition. [43] But clearly there was a broad set of conjectural forces that led to its dominance and spread. Disempowering labor and disciplining the poor seems, in retrospect, to have been a clear goal of this transition. The rearguard reaction of austerity after 2008 demonstrates this without a shadow of a doubt. Yet the fantasy of a post-industrial society was inspiring. As Andrew Ross has recently pointed out, the demand for more intellectually stimulating, individually empowering work such as that of creative labor was central to the workers movements of the 1970s. [44] Were it not for the accompanying precarity, it might be bearable. [45]

This was supposed to turn out differently for us. In the 1990s, speculating on strategies for urban development in the postindustrial economy, Richard Florida proposed the concept of the creative class. This nascent population was attracted like moths to city lights and urban appurtenances like deindustrialized loft space, sports stadiums, and LGBTQ enclaves. For city planners this was wonderful news since it meant they no longer had to undertake politically difficult tasks like economic planning: just throw out the cheap and easy catnip - which basically meant leaving the pre-gentrified, deindustrialized spaces of racially-segregated "urban blight" alone until "creatives" could displace the remaining poor minorities, revive it, and entice yuppies with actual money and jobs to move in and install the granite countertops and stainless steel appliances that would ultimately increase property values (and the tax base). Along the way, if tech start-ups or marketing firms wanted pools of cheap, precarious labor to exploit, they would find them readily available.

This is what Richard Lloyd, in his investigation of the Wicker Park area of Chicago, discovers is the primary result of the culture-industry geared development of that era: a lopsided arrangement where the bohemian underclass persists contract to contract at the will of fly-by-night startups gunning to make a killing on an IPO and then move on. The few sustained businesses resembling "creative industry" mainstays were only sustained by their ability to rely on this flexible pool of talented labor. [46] In the words of Andrew Ross, it was nice work if you could get it. David Harvey concurs, saying that most of the benefits of this economic development plan were sopped up in rising property values, most of which did little except fuel a housing bubble, the results of which the world knows all too well. [47]

At the same time, our economic and social disempowerment is mirrored by an incredible proliferation of possibilities for creating culture. Though the main organs of the Culture Industry remain in the hands of a few multinational corporations - and though our creative labor largely serves their bottom lines rather than our own - the expansion of spaces for conversation

and constructive intellectual endeavors is seemingly unprecedented. Cultural Studies scholars are fully aware of – and rightly enthusiastic about – these new forms of cultural production and reception. In many ways, this breakdown of the circuit of culture was foretold many years ago, when the newly translated introduction to the *Grundrisse* led Hall, Johnson and others to speculate on the true nature of culture, which lay submerged beneath the institutional weight of the culture industries. [48] People, the story went, were not dupes: they just had no way to register their necessarily alternative readings except through subcultural appropriations that were, by definition, invisible to the dominant culture. As Lawrence Lessig says in his *Remix* this “read only” culture has now been remade by a transformation in the productive and distributional technologies and the social software by which we utilize it. [49] It is now, at least potentially, a “Read/Write” or, in Jenkins words, convergence culture. [50]

Again, like the account of neoliberalism, this transformation is tiresome to replay, if only because it hides a great deal of residual corporate control. Likewise, it is hard to say whether the new networked infrastructure actually creates more democratic control over culture, or just makes the always already complex “everyday life” of culture visible on a grander scale.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that, while face-to-face planning meetings were essential, Western anticapitalist movements like those that converged in Seattle in 1999 and throughout the early 2000s at trade and economic meetings around the world were greatly facilitated by the new means of communication, via organs like Indymedia. The present Occupy movements seem to have spread via a similar alternative communication network, though their bread and butter seem to be the unusual “prefigurative” experience of actually communing with fellow flesh and blood humans. Whatever the long term effects of this movement, it has achieved something unprecedented in recent memory: it helped shift the conversation from the hegemonic hair-splitting of punishing austerity to, in the words of Joshua Holland, “a discussion of the real issues facing Main Street: the lack of jobs – and especially jobs with decent benefits – spiraling inequality, cash-strapped American families’ debt-loads, and the pernicious influence of money in politics that led us to this point.” [51]

This is a belated realization that the apparent decline of our alienation in relation to the spectacle corresponds to the moment when class power is more pronounced than at any time in the 20th century – or at least its second half. In this, Cultural Studies questions are all the more urgent even as they realize that some of its basic premises was fundamentally incorrect – or at least highly conjunctural. Namely, that the economy disembedded from society remains a key form of coercive power and a crucial lever of political and cultural change. Therefore organizing politics around material as well as cultural issues remains – or is once again – essential. Nowhere is this clearer than in the current permutation of the culture industry – or just the tech-facilitated demotic eruption of the mercurial process of culture in general – and the dominant narrative about our collective future as workers in the creative industries.

To be blunt, the most important issue facing us is not how to produce more creative, inspirational, progressive, or transformational culture. Though the incumbent industries continue to fight their own rearguard action with bills like SOPA and treaties like ACTA, it is clear that people will make stuff – all kinds of stuff – if they are given time and materials. Even the alienation of work is hardly a pressing problem when so much work is now precarious. In other words, the basic issues of redistribution come once again to the fore. The enormous redistribution upwards must be reversed, by force if necessary: to cite a prescient fellow on this, “the expropriators must be expropriated.” In a sense, the upset of the culture industry alongside the tremendous economic collapse brought on by irrational finance has been a laboratory demonstration of how little of cultural and social value is actually rewarded economically by our current system.

As a society, we have plenty of resources – probably too much, if the climate had any say about it. Houses now sit empty across the globe – from foreclosed properties in the US to enormous

ghost cities of overpriced housing in China - while slums are expanding. In the US, a national charity - called Feeding America - features centrally in the narrative of NBC's product placement juggernaut *The Biggest Loser*. The goal of this charity is patently absurd by any reasonable standard. Everyday, grocery stores, farmers, and food manufacturers throw away perfectly good food simply because hungry, jobless people lack the tiny certificates to trade for it. The charity asks people to donate money so that they can buy this food from the retailers and make it available to needy people, obviating the possibility that the precious M-C-M' cycle might be undermined by pressure of human need. [52] Clothing retailers, likewise, often shred unbought clothing to prevent homeless or otherwise needy people from using it. [53] In his recent book on the economic crisis, Zizek speaks of the economic system that creates this insanity in terms of Pareto Optimality:

A century ago, Vilfredo Pareto was the first to describe the so-called 80/20 rule of social (and not only social) life: 80 percent of the land is owned by 20 percent of the people, 80 percent of the profits are produced by 20 percent of the employees, 80 percent of decisions are made in 20 percent of the meeting time, 80 percent of the links to the Web point to less than 20 percent of the Webpages, 80 percent of the peas come from 20 percent of the peapods. As some social analysts and economists have suggested, the contemporary explosion of productivity confronts us with the ultimate case of this rule: the coming global economy will tend towards a state in which only 20 percent of the labor force are able to do all the necessary work, so that 80 percent of people will be basically irrelevant and of no use, thus potentially unemployed. As this logic reaches its extreme, would it not be reasonable to bring it to its self-negation: is not a system which renders 80 percent of people irrelevant and useless *itself irrelevant and of no use*. [54]

Globally, if not nationally, we likely have the largest proportion of citizens trained to do creative, critical work AND able to use most affordable consumer grade tools in its production, distribution, and consumption in the history of human culture. Were the food, health, transportation, housing, and education infrastructure distributed and supported in relatively proportional levels, these citizens could likely live and produce in relative comfort, possibly even to the point of letting the third world subjects who produce many of their life necessities to share their leisurely lifestyle. After all, isn't this basically what the promise of modernization is supposed to bring? More leisure, now instead of when we imagine ourselves retiring? If technology is making it necessary for fewer people to work (or for all people to work less), that seems like a good thing: it just needs to be dealt with in a fair and proportional manner. Instead, what we find is the absurdity Andre Gorz describes in his *Critique of Economic Reason*:

The continued division of society [as dominant economic theorists now conceive it] is inevitable. The reason for this division will be (as it is already) the unequal distribution of the savings made in working hours: an increasingly large proportion of the population will continue to be expelled, or else marginalized, from the sphere of economic activities, whilst another section will continue to work as much as, or even more than, it does at present, commanding, as a result of its [perceived] performances or aptitudes ever-increasing incomes and economic powers. Unwilling to give up part of their work and the prerogatives and powers that go with their jobs, the members of this professional elite will only be able to increase their leisure time by getting third parties to procure their free time for them. Therefore they will ask these third parties to do in their place things everyone is capable of doing, particularly all labour referred to as 'reproduction.' And they will purchase services and appliances which will allow them to save time even when producing these services and appliances takes more time than the average person will save by using them. They will thus foster the development, across the whole of society, of activities which have no economic rationality - since the people performing them have to spend more time doing them than

the people benefiting from them actually save - and which only serve the private interests of this professional elite, who are able to purchase time more cheaply than they can sell it personally. These are activities performed by servants, whatever the status of the people who do them or method of payment used. [55]

Thus we return to what Robinson described above as the interwar condition where, "the damaged self-respect, the desperate egoism and cringing fear on one side [meets] the smug self-deception on the other." This time, however, it is sold as a glorious future of precarious cultural production as servants to the rich. While we live in a world of plenty, our potentates are running around like the folks at Feeding America, trying to figure out how they can distribute pointless jobs to people so they can afford to buy stuff that would otherwise go to waste. At both ends of the equation are the wealthy 1%: we must figure out how to produce value for them through some direct, servile activity so that we can earn a wage to purchase the commodities that will provide them with their necessary profits. If our life and death weren't so utterly dependent on it, this charade would indeed be a farce. As it stands, it is merely a tragedy.

In discussing the consequences of this potential impending reality, Zizek turns to one of the fonts of leftish wisdom for commentary. Antonio Negri, in an interview with *Le Monde* chides textile workers picketing for their rights. Zizek paraphrases his well-known position thusly:

For Negri, the workers stood for all that is wrong with traditional trade-unionist socialism focused on job security, a socialism hopelessly rendered obsolete by the dynamics of 'post-modern' capitalism and the hegemonic position of cognitive labor. According to Negri, instead of reacting to this 'new spirit of capitalism' in the traditional social democratic fashion, seeing it as a threat, one should fully embrace it, in order to discern within it - in the dynamics of cognitive labor with its non-hierarchical and non-centralized forms of social interaction - the seeds of communism. [56]

In this third phase of the culture industry - and studies of it - we have feasted on a steady diet of this political economic vision. Surely it has caused a great deal of indigestion, but the overall shift to thinking about culture in these terms is undeniable. As Harney argues, the overlap here makes a great deal of sense given their conjunctural intellectual affinities. However, immaterial labor, the Multitude and the prefigural politics of the common have become the dominant threshold of permissible thinking and strategy. Instead of working towards redistribution or organizing labor or social movements with specific political economic demands, the Italianate oracles of the Common recommend a hands off approach which is guaranteed to do nothing to offend or oppress anyone because it is guaranteed to have almost no direct effect at all.

In the supposedly biopolitical forms of production that dominate today, it is less clear that the process of primitive accumulation prevents us from sustaining ourselves physically except in so far as the appropriated value, had it been remunerated, could have been used to support our purchase of the commodities necessary for life. In this sense, the new forms of precarious labor are certainly instructive in helping us to understand just how exceptional the Fordist economy was. But this doesn't mean, as Hardt and Negri claim, that "biopolitical production is not constrained by the logic of scarcity." [57] The multitude may be an excellent example of Deleuze and Guattari's "body without organs," but its constituent components are still constrained by the need to sustain themselves physically. In a sense, this exuberance over the third stage of the culture industry has blinkered us to the material realities that were perfectly obvious at each of the previous stages.

Hardt and Negri are generally, frustratingly vague about how the biopolitical common will also support its biological entities - and therefore how their exit from this arbitrary servitude to capital will be possible. This is true across the three volumes of their opus. In most cases,

their work operates, as Timothy Brennon describes *Empire*, "in terms of an *interstitial logic*. It plays in the theoretical registers of plausible deniability;" its baroque "fresco of the political constitution of the present renders ambiguity the virtue of being 'theoretical.'" Therefore their apparent lack of any concern for the material reality of people's everyday lives or the possible efficacy of other forms of conventional political struggle can always be answered with "the ready riposte [that] the reader merely misunderstood." [58]

They only briefly address this in their most recent book, *Commonwealth*, wherein they descend, for six pages out of 400, to elaborate on a set of Keynesian inspired reforms "aimed at providing the infrastructure necessary for biopolitical production." [59] These include adequate food, drinking water, sanitary conditions, electricity, "and other physical necessities to support life," as well as a compendium of further necessities: education, access to an internet that is open at all levels, money for research, freedom of movement, freedom of time (i.e. a guaranteed minimum income, which is ultimately what Gorz recommends to end the absurdity he describes), and a completely participatory form of democracy. Like Keynes, they insist that these should be instituted by capital in order to save itself, but that they will still only be done "when capital is forced to accept them." By what means and with what leverage we are supposed to force its hand, they don't say.

Yet, even if it does so - whether because it is forced by struggles or "pursuing its own interests and trying preserve its own survival" - it will ultimately create "its own gravediggers." Here we discover that, once these things are provided, "the multitude will emerge with the ability autonomously to rule common wealth." [60] The precondition of their entire oeuvre, in other words, is a society with all the benefits of socialism and social democracy, but none of the messy politics of organization. On how to achieve this precondition, they also remain silent.

Current economic and political realities demand that Cultural Studies and studies of the cultural industries fill in this gap. The struggle we face is much older than our discipline and in some ways it requires our building once again the material preconditions of post-war critical theory. Better yet, we should demand what the post-war consensus never imagined: the list supplied by Hardt and Negri is a good start, but as any activist on those issues will tell you, it is a long, divisive slog. Serendipitously, the current social movement is perfectly positioned to begin articulating these demands, and, as mentioned above, Cultural Studies has a legacy of working with reflexivity and openness.

However, it should be said that, as a movement, the emergent demands of Occupy Wall Street are far less radical: for the most part, it seems the mainstream participants find the most troubling aspect of contemporary US society that it fails to live up to the narrative drafted in that post war era. Taking on debt to get a college education was supposed to guarantee a comfortable bourgeois livelihood. The stifling alienation of the welfare state and the stable job appear as far off fantasies to the current generation of well-educated debt peons.

Here the path of Cultural Studies and the Occupy movement come into direct material contact, if not conflict. Along with the mutual concern for a more democratic and just society, they also sit in concrete material relation. On the one side are the protesters above who find themselves saddled with unprecedented financial liabilities and no foreseeable way to discharge them. Andrew Ross and others have been quick to notice this and have begun one of the few concrete efforts at making demands through the Occupy Student Debt movement: namely, creating a debt strike. On the other side, Cultural Studies as an academic and intellectual endeavor, finds itself in one of the last bastions of the publically funded culture industry: in a swirling era of postmodern culture, where all the remaining non-capitalist arenas have been commodified, the commodification of education has been slow (though hardly immune from this trend). Yet it is ultimately the students above who have made this shelter possible. Their relentless and diligent self-exploitation has helped to pay the tuition, which pays an increasingly large proportion of

the salaries and operational funds of academic departments housing all forms of critical inquiry. This says nothing, of course, about the similarly diligent self-exploitation of the casualized academic labor force that shores up budgets on the other end.

A reckoning is coming however. The occupy movement will either transform this element of the culture industry for the better, or it will help venture capitalists drive it into complete obsolescence. Lining up on one side are those who will begin to question the value of this institution at all. For young people watching this unfold, the question of the value of a college degree is clearly ambiguous. If taking on debt and undertaking a long process of learning will place them in no less precarious position, why bother. Better yet, if learning can be accomplished through open access MOOCs or General Assembly type working groups, is it really necessary to pony up the cash?

On the other side, however, higher education (and education more generally) is poised to become the next financial bubble. While students may become skeptical of the value of the degree, the current administration believes it is innately valuable -regardless of the learning it represents. The vast federal funds available for underprivileged students have drawn the vultures of venture capital in thick flocks. Promising increased efficiency through online platforms and the final elimination of tenure, they hope to drain the last remaining public funds for education and, in the case of K-12, effectively destroy the public system. This will not last long as it will likely be completely ineffective pedagogically, implemented as it will be with little input from people with an interest in teaching or learning. After the damage is done, the winners will take their spoils and move on.

This needn't be the future of the academy or the future of cultural studies, much less the future of the current generation. But in many ways, the problem at hand is the problem of all culture industries: there are likely more than enough people to educate the coming generation. Paying for these teachers (i.e. us) shouldn't be left to the students or their families. And the money available to do this shouldn't be siphoned off by representatives of the very financial class that caused this situation to begin with. Occupy Student Debt helps to target the first element, with Ross saying, "We think education is a right and a public good, and we think federal funding is the only way the United States can join the list of other countries that offer free public education." [61] And, though this movement has struck the ire of the for-profit sector (at least via the pages of *Inside Higher Ed*), [62] it will take even more specific demands to limit the possibility that august institutions like Kaplan or The University of Phoenix will be the ones happily administering this free public education.

Scholars of Cultural Studies and the culture industry have a rare opportunity to intervene in this struggle. They must begin with an understanding of the relationship between their theory and the dominant political economy as well as the legacy of its permutations over the past half-century. More importantly, they must strike a delicate balance between the process-oriented, prefigural politics of the democratic socialist tradition they wish to encourage and the clearly articulated demand for what Ross calls "the making of sustainable livelihoods." [63] This means taking the best from each of the eras we've just gone through such that, in his words, "Everyone should have a right to choose their own balance of freedom and security in employment, and we should craft policies to ensure that making the wrong choices does not prove catastrophic to people." Creating a culture with these values is essential to our common future - and it is possible we are closer than we have been in a generation to bringing it about.

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DISTRIBUTED CENTRALIZATION: WEB 2.0 AS A PORTAL INTO USERS' LIVES

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Because the inhabitants, as producers and as consumers, are drawn into the center in search of work and pleasure, all the living units crystallise into well-organised complexes. The striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular. - Adorno and Horkheimer

Cybernetic loops, anxious movements, random patterns, professional- and amateur-made content, multiple browser tabs, viral propagation: all of these mark the use of Web 2.0 sites. Online, users move fluidly from one Web site to another. A user who enjoys a Lolcat video on YouTube can "like" it, thus producing a post in his Facebook stream. That user might then change tabs back to Facebook to read comments his friends posted about the video. A particularly snarky comment by one friend is so funny, the user tweets it in Twitter via TweetDeck. While in Twitter, he sees a Tweet for a Wikipedia article on Lolcats, so he clicks on the link. After reading up on the history of Lolcats, he notices a reference in the Wikipedia article to a *Colbert Report* skit about politician's cats, so he clicks on that and is sent to Hulu. He finds *that* video so entertaining that he "likes" it, starting the process all over again. This activity is noticed by one of this user's Facebook friends on her iPhone; she happens to be a reporter for the *New York Times* and writes a piece on viral digital culture and the production of a new Lolcat app for the Apple iPad. In the course of her reporting, she researches Lolcats with Google searches, feeding new search strings into Google's growing database. Once her article is posted on a *Times* culture blog, readers can log in to Facebook and notice that their friends are all reading that article, and they can start new threads of comments, "likes," Diggs, tweets, and maybe a new Internet meme.

This shifting movement between user-led and mass media content production on computers and mobile devices, with its accompanying loops that feed into dataveillant images of media consumption, is complex and difficult to map. There is a growing body of critical research that outlines the means by which Web 2.0 sites attempt to capture and create archives from these feedback loops. However, much of this work implies that these activities happen within "walled gardens" (such as Facebook or Google) just as might happen within older Internet services such as Compuserve or Prodigy. As powerful as Facebook or Google are, they aren't (yet) the whole Internet; rather, they are articulated within a wider network of third-party applications, major media companies, small blogs, and niche sites.

How do we map this movement? Langlois *et al* rightly suggest "that one entry point towards mapping Web 2.0 worlds is through platforms and through the visualization of the many connections operated by the platforms between users, content and protocols." [1] That is, we have to map Web 2.0 worlds by tracing their linkages in much the same way as users move from site to site: at one moment, we have to be at the interface level, and the next, we have to follow the code.

When we do this, we see that Web 2.0 as a whole is beginning to take a decidedly interconnected shape. Facebook, Google, YouTube, Wikipedia, Blogger, Twitter and other Web 2.0 sites are linked to one another in a complex and bewildering array of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), user-created applications, links, protocols, and browser extensions. The hypothetical Lolcats

scenario described above points to the myriad ways these sites are linked within the shifting whims of an individual user.

To trace these connections, this paper draws on the intersection between computing, software engineering, and the management of labor in informational capitalism to uncover an architectural model with which to understand this complexity: the portal model. We will see how the interconnections between Web 2.0 sites, built on de facto protocols, is creating the Web as Portal, an architecture built to capture value produced by users, value that was previously hidden as unstructured data. Web 2.0 as a portal is rife with contradictions: on the one hand, the Web (and Internet) remain distributed networks, and Web 2.0 applications could easily be mapped as distributed. On the other hand, extremely popular sites such as Facebook (for social networking) and Google (for search), as well as the increasing interconnection between them, are rendering Web 2.0 to be a centralized network. This distributed centralization is part of the larger portal architecture, wherein heterogeneous sites are articulated into a network of networks.

To be fair, the concept of Web 2.0 as a portal is only an idealized structure; the Web remains a messy place. However, commercial Web 2.0 sites, built out of the free labor of users and enjoying power law distributions, have begun to carve out niches within the broader Web, effectively rendering them "portlets" in a larger architecture. As specialized sites such as Google and Facebook gain more monopoly power over their respective niches, they have also built means to interlink with other sites and one another. And, since user data is a non-rival good, Facebook, Google, Twitter are all willing to share in order to maintain and increase flows of user data into their archives. [2]

To explore this, first I will draw on the fifteen years of literature on the corporate portal. This networking architecture has been developed for corporate intranets, allowing for the management of far-flung transnational corporations and the creative processes of knowledge workers. Corporate intranet portals are part of the larger shift to a new hegemonic form of labor: precarious immaterial and cognitive labor. [3] This architecture involves collecting various applications, called "portlets," into an online interface. Like the "portal" metaphor implies, employees are meant to view their work-worlds through this circumscribed interface; this vision structures their knowledge work.

Then, using the descriptions of the corporate portal architecture as a roadmap, I will describe how Web 2.0 sites can themselves be conceptualized as portlets, modules within a larger portal architecture. Just as corporate portals allow for the management and abstraction of the knowledge work of employees, the Web 2.0 portal allows for the structuring and management of user-led "produsage." [4] I ultimately argue that the Web 2.0 portal is geared towards structuring the internal, emotional lives of users - for the benefit, of course, of marketing and the realization of surplus value locked in commodities.

Corporate Portals and the dream of realizing a "goldmine" of unstructured information

Looking to the portal as a model for Web 2.0's complex, networked structure is counterintuitive. After all, Web 2.0 is supposed to mean the death of the portal. During the late 1990s, in what we might retronymically call "Web 1.0," portals like Yahoo and Excite were geared towards attracting as wide an audience as possible. They did so by creating directories of Web sites in categories such as "News" and "Sports," producing original editorial content, and offering search, chat, and email services. In addition, Yahoo and Excite allowed users to personalize the site by selecting specific news and topical areas of interest to be displayed. In short, the portal model sought to be all things to all users, to be all-encompassing and authoritative and yet personal and inviting. As the name implies, the Web portal was meant to be a window into the Web which users could gaze through without ever leaving the safe, expert-created confines of the

portal site. Portals were, in fact, a mass media model applied to the Web, with the de-massified twist of degrees of personalization.

However, the Internet stock bubble burst of the early 2000s significantly reduced the production of mass media-style Web sites. In addition, Web 2.0 pundits have argued that the "long tail" [5] and decentralization of today's Web have buried the portal model for good in favor of "small pieces loosely joined" [6] - that is, small sites that focus on specific, niche services and allow users to pick and choose among them. One of the most notorious examples of failed portals is the Time Warner/AOL merger, which has become a symbol of pre-1999 thinking about the political economy of the Web. Thus, we are told, the Web shifts from a modernist, mass media environment to a postmodern space of bricolage and user-led customization - and even a return to pre-mass society economics and culture. [7]

Although mass media-style portals such as Yahoo's have been declared dead, the portal model has in fact lived on in the corporate world, largely as a potential solution to the problems of corporate IT architectures. Particularly after the advent of the minicomputer, corporations increasingly invested in IT equipment - personal computers for workers, networks, private data lines - multiplying the number of means of communication and information storage. This fragmentation of data storage occurred even though builders of corporate intranets eschewed peer-to-peer networking in favor of more centralized client/server architectures. This uneven and chaotic distribution of databases and information was especially exacerbated as corporations congealed into conglomerated, globalized transnational entities with more and more divisions. Most importantly, the databases scattered across divisions or even across countries were often incompatible. This mass of unstructured data was unwieldy, difficult to search, difficult to link together, and it represented countless years of labor to build, let alone maintain. In short, this data fragmentation was anathema in the "information age," since information and knowledge, not factories and labor, were ostensibly the most valuable assets of any corporation. [8]

The popularity of Yahoo in the 1990s led information technology pundits to argue that the portal could solve this problem, thus "unlocking" the goldmine of information hidden away in scattered servers, emails, text documents, and even in the heads of employees. Just as Yahoo had seemingly tamed the heterogeneous Web with a mix of directories, search, and personalization, all provided by an interface that could be accessed from any computer, so too could the corporate portal tame a company's information overload. As Martin White notes, "the holy grail of IT directors, especially in the corporate sector, has been to find some technology that integrates all these applications onto a single consistent desktop. The solution seems to be to implement portal software, so that the technology does all the work and users have a scalable universal interface to all existing and future applications." [9]

Although definitions of corporate portals often differ wildly (especially among vendors who are competing for business and thus attempting to differentiate their products), by and large the literature [10] describes portals as having the following features:

A desktop replacement - Computers are universal machines capable of running many different programs, and employees can easily get lost in all of them. Do I use Word or WordPerfect? Which program do I use to transfer files, CyberDuck or FileZilla? The portal is meant to reduce this confusion by *replacing* the graphical desktop (that is, the metaphorical space on the screen that includes files, folders, and a trash can) and thus, for all extents and purposes replacing the underlying computer itself. It provides "access to all applications and information that the user needs regardless of whether these are local or networked." [11] This also allows the company to have a clearer inventory of software applications running on employees' computers. The portal is thus another layer of abstraction on top of the machine, simultaneously simplifying computer use and centralizing applications.

Single sign-on - Rather than asking employees to maintain several passwords for different sites across the intranet, portals would allow for a single accreditation to be linked to each employee. Not only would the employee benefit from not having to remember and change multiple passwords, the company would have a centralized accreditation database, complete with detailed access logs, and the company could set varying degrees of access permission for each employee or category of employees. Instead of allowing an employee elevated access (say to financial records) in one intranet domain while prohibiting access to that same information in another, the corporation could set consistent permissions precisely linked to each employee. [12] Moreover, individual employee activities can be better measured and monitored if their real-world identities are linked to their online identities.

Personalization - Different employees use different networked tools. The portal literature almost unanimously calls for employees to have the ability to select which tools they use and remove irrelevant ones. Instead of wasting time navigating parts of the intranet that are irrelevant to their jobs, employees could instead get to work on their tasks much more quickly. This would also benefit the company, because data is easily collected on which tools are frequently used and which are never used by employees. This data would help CIOs make decisions about future tools and features to build or purchase.

Content management - In a portal, the massive amount of text, images, and multimedia on corporate networks must be centralized into a content management system. [13] This becomes an "information warehouse" that can be managed and integrated into the flows of networks. [14] This would allow for employees producing public-facing documents such as Web pages or brochures to quickly gather content. Content management systems also allow users to upload content into the centralized system.

Collaboration tools - Similar to the content management system, collaboration tools would codify the process by which multiple people work on digital documents. Drawing on each of the previous features, collaboration tools link identified users with one another, with standardized applications, and with the needed content to build new documents. Since these tools are networked, collaboration can take place across spans of distance and time.

In theory, these features are accomplished by building portals out of small pieces called "portlets." [15] Portlets are the component parts of the portal containing a small amount of code dedicated to a specific task, often gathering information or sending data from the client's computer to a server. A user might have search, chat, HR, spreadsheet, and news portlets on his portal's desktop. They are modeled after computer desktop graphical interfaces, complete with window decorations and "close" and "minimize" buttons. Just as a user could close a window on her desktop, so too can she close a portlet and replace it with another. Portlets are thus interchangeable; a user might substitute one for another in order to gain access to different functions. This is the heart of the personalization aspect of portals, because it replicates the interface of the PC desktop.

However, while portals use portlets in the same manner as a computer's operating system uses local applications, portals can use networked or local applications. In the above list, the chat portlet might be a locally-based (i.e., client-side) application, but the spreadsheet program might be hosted on a server elsewhere on the intranet. This structure even allows for third-party portlets; a corporate portal might use a mix of internally stored applications with portlets that are hosted outside the corporate intranet. For all their central appearance, portals can in fact be a collection of widely distributed and hosted applications, databases, and users.

However, despite the possibility for distribution, in order to function properly, portlets must be linked to centralized systems that can confirm identity for single sign-on, ensure that the user's personalization persists, manage approved applications, and link databases to content management and collaboration tools. However unique a user's personalized portal is, all data must flow through the centralized system. Moreover, for portlets to interoperate, their connections must flow through a centralized service that could translate their various protocols and thus coordinate data flows from one portlet to another.

In this sense, portals are artifacts of distributed centralization. On the one hand, the components of the portal might be developed by a wide range of third-party vendors, and portlets are networked applications that do not necessarily reside on any particular intranet; they are thus distributed, networked structures. But the necessity to link them to authentication and coordination services centralizes them.

Managing globalization and structuring knowledge work

The literature on corporate portals speaks of multiple benefits, including reducing costs by cutting use of paper products and enabling employees to self-service (by finding HR forms on their own, for example); reducing employees' time to find data; enabling collaboration among employees, even across divisions of the organization, time, and space; and getting news out to employees faster, even if they're away from the main office. Access to information seems to be at the heart of each of these benefits.

However, considering these portals from a critical political economic perspective, the most salient benefits are twofold: first, an effective portal will allow for centralized management of even the most far-flung transnational corporation. Second, and most importantly, portals enable corporations to extract and structure the knowledge of their workers, even tacit knowledge that was previously inaccessible to management.

The globalization of the corporation and the increasing emphasis on information and networks are complementary processes. As Dan Schiller argues, especially after neoliberalism began in the 1970s, networks were increasingly valued by corporations which sought to commodify the fruits of the general intellect (i.e., local knowledge, scientific knowledge) and to expand into new labor and consumption markets in the developing world. [16] The corporate portal is one important artifact of this globalization. Just as Yahoo could introduce a mass media model to the distributed, far-flung Web, a corporation could create an internal mass medium to distribute its culture and receive feedback from employees.

This is especially true of corporations that rely on contingent workers: if transnational corporations outsource functions to third parties and increasingly rely on contractual labor, they still desire to maintain at least a surface-level cohesion. [17] Networked portals allow their employees (of all designations - full-time to part-time, temporary, or contractual) to access corporate information flows from home, office, in the pub, or while on vacation. The portal, then, acts as a channel of communication and as a corporate brand capable of binding employees to the organization, even if they're miles away from headquarters or if they relate to the corporation via contingent contracts.

Second, in capitalism, the process of rendering a worker's tacit knowledge into an alienated material form such as a machine or a process is nothing new. An example is in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*:

In the first fire-engines, a boy was constantly employed to open and shut alternately the communication between the boiler and the cylinder, according as the piston either ascended or descended. One of those boys, who loved to play with his companions, observed that, by tying a string from the handle of the valve which opened this

communication to another part of the machine, the valve would open and shut without his assistance, and leave him at liberty to divert himself with his play-fellows. One of the greatest improvements that has been made upon this machine, since it was first invented, was in this manner the discovery of a boy who wanted to save his own labour. [18]

Thus, the boy's embodied knowledge of the machine's operation, drawn from working with the machine and learning its rhythms, is transferred to another machine, albeit a simple one: a string. Smith does not go on to discuss the ownership of this invention, but presumably, in keeping with the traditions of private property and the appropriation of labor in capitalism, the boy's intellectual property transferred to the owner of the machine. Moreover, one would presume the capitalist would put the boy to work on some other task rather than paying him to play.

Although Smith's example is likely apocryphal, [19] there is much empirical evidence of the process by which laborers' knowledge is transferred into machines. Harry Braverman's famous analysis of Taylorism offers many examples of "deskilling," or the alienation of skilled laborer's conceptual abilities and autonomy. [20] In deskilling, tools do not serve the worker, who can make decisions about their use based on the worker's knowledge of how a task is to be done; rather, workers serve and are dictated to by the tools themselves. David Noble's *Forces of Production* is also marked by the transfer of worker knowledge into machines. [21] Similarly, Shoshana Zuboff found that the embodied, tacit knowledge of workers in paper mills – so ingrained in them that they could judge the quality of paper by sensing the electricity in the air with their hair or by slapping paper pulp with their hands – was abstracted from them and encoded in computer systems. [22] Joan Greenbaum's analysis of clerical work uncovers similar abstraction happening in offices, where clerical processes become locked into various technologies and digitized. [23] Finally, as Eva Illouz [24] and Arlie Hochschild [25] have forcefully argued, even the highly subjective inner world of emotion is being abstracted and digitized in capitalism.

Likewise, at the heart of the corporate portal literature is the concept of "structuring" unstructured data. "Unstructured data" is often presented in the literature as something benign: "files, documentation, email, engineering drawings, project plans, product manuals, Web pages, etc., and is created on a variety of systems using a variety of formats." [26] Essentially, these are documents that have no structured metadata associated with them. In order to conceive of them as unstructured, these documents are compared to their Others: structured data sets such as information stored in tables, complete with elaborate categorization and metadata. Whereas structured data sets are easy to search and manipulate, unstructured documents are organized chaotically, difficult to search, and extremely difficult to manipulate with business intelligence tools. And yet, the portal literature repeatedly refers to this unstructured data as extremely valuable, as a "gold mine" [27] or as "information gems" [28] hidden away in corporate intranets. This makes intuitive sense: anyone who has hunted in vain for an old email or text document that contains a vaguely remembered nugget of information knows the frustration of difficult to search data. What portals promise is ability to manage these documents, label them with metadata, centralize them, and bring them into the domain of search engines, thus rendering this data coherent and accessible to the corporation. As Staab *et al* put it, "coherent integration of information is only possible with a conceptual basis that may sort loose pieces of information into a well-defined knowledge warehouse." [29] Portals promise this.

However, despite the benign discussion of structuring unstructured data, what the portal literature ultimately describes is the *structuring and subsequent appropriation of the creative, knowledge work of employees*. In her review of the portal literature, Cláudia Dias describes the transmogrification and digitization of knowledge: a knowledge worker acquires knowledge from "documents, e-mails, web pages, reports, and presented by the corporate portal web interface on the computer screen. Once read, this knowledge becomes information and is absorbed into the cognitive framework of each person. Information is then converted into

subjective knowledge, when the contents of the document read match the user's concepts during the cognitive process." [30] This knowledge is then "reinterpreted" when "subjective knowledge" is transcribed with "word processors, spreadsheets, presentation software, etc." This creative process is the true "gold mine" to be exploited with corporate portals. The production of unstructured data is, in fact, the processes of creative labor of the knowledge worker. The knowledge worker's task is to be creative, to generate new ideas from information streams and databases. The fact that this creative labor is "unstructured" means that these processes are largely tacit and thus far less accessible to management. The portal promises to capture - to structure - creative labor, to turn it into "understanding." [31] In his dissertation on corporate portals, Hong Tuan Kiet Vo argues that the return on the investment in portals arises largely from the structuring of unstructured, creative processes. [32] Vo uses the example of a business process that

is highly unstructured and requires the processing of data and information that is dispersed across the organization. Furthermore, assume that the process is a business critical process and periodically conducted with great effort. With regard to these additional assumptions, a corporate portal implementation can offer access to the required data sources and furthermore facilitate the information process by the means of information services for data aggregation, validation, and reporting ultimately improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the process. [33]

Parsing this clinical language, we see that portals provide the means to divide, document, and digitize creative labor. It is a dual process of structuring internally held data (built, no doubt, by employees) and structuring the very processes by which knowledge workers gather data. Once it is structured, it can be managed, altered, abstracted, outsourced, or replicated in a machine. Creative, cultural labor thus becomes contingent labor, the work of the cognitariat. As Toby Miller argues, the cognitariat might be the lauded, exemplary worker of neoliberalism, but the cognitariat also suffers from "conditions of flexible production and ideologies of 'freedom'...", lacking "the organization of the traditional working class and the political entr   of the old middle class." [34] The praise heaped on the "creative class" is concomitant with that class being drawn into the sphere of management and exploitation.

This creative labor is a true "gold mine," but one that is difficult to exploit. Cognitive laborers identify with their work far more than factory laborers in Fordism. As a consequence, they extend their own workdays and blur the lines between work and leisure. [35] However, the management challenge here is measurement and abstraction: "The content of labour becomes mental, but at the same time the limits of productive work become uncertain. The very notion of productivity becomes imprecise: the relationship between time and quantity of value produced becomes difficult to stabilise, because not all the hours of a cognitive labourer are equal in terms of productivity." [36] This explains in part the recurrence of the corporate portal in the literature and in software markets. The architecture of the portal promises to better gauge, reduce, and abstract the workflows of the cognitariat.

Furthermore, these twofold benefits can be synthesized: with management centralized and with the work processes of cognitive workers structured into data sets, transnational companies can effectively find and exploit cheaper sources of labor throughout the world. Formerly creative or affective forms of labor - customer service, computer programming, research, even grading students [37] - have been outsourced in part due to globalized information networks and corporate management via networked portals. Just as the networked portal is another layer of abstraction on top of the material networks on which it resides, the immaterial or cognitive labor of users becomes an abstraction. As Jodi Dean argues, "immaterial service-sector labor increases the abstraction and homogenization of work. Workers are more distanced from the specific tasks, tools, and products of their labor. And their labor tends to be the same insofar as all are required to have basic computer skills." [38] When cognitive labor is homogenized, the creative skills of the worker become unimportant, and the only factors in deciding who does

the work are: can I pay them less? And will they be flexible? After this, the global scan for cheap labor in unregulated markets can begin.

Even as it scours the world for precarious workers, the corporation can also create a unified culture with an effective portal. Although the literature on corporate portals presents personalization as a key feature of any portal, the literature also notes that all employees should be linked to the same portal. As Sugianto and Tojib note, portals "represent a customized, personalized, constantly changing mix of news, resources, applications, and e-commerce options intended to be the desktop destination for everyone in the organization and a primary vehicle through which people do their work." [39] Recognizing the role of the Web in distracting workers as well as enabling them, Sugianto and Tojib even go so far as to suggest that corporate portals even include "shopping services" so "employees can manage their work as well as personal matters without the intervention of other administrative staff." [40] They suggest corporations strike deals with third-party vendors to market goods directly to employees. [41] Thus, not only will employees' work patterns flow through the portal, but the diversions will, as well. This is an intranet version of the mass media spectacle and political organization qua the screen: "Instead of individuals linked to one another, each is linked to spectacle via the screen. Mass observation, or, better, the broadcasting and announcement of an event as an event to masses of people, produces and determines what is common, what is to be significant to the collective (and in so doing, produces what is to be the collective)." [42] In all, portals provide employees of the far-flung corporation a sense of cohesion and identity, while offering the corporation access to the abstracted, structured creative knowledge of its employees.

However, to be certain, the portal dream remains a dream long deferred. Many corporate portals fail. [43] On a technical level, even those that can associate various functions within a customizable interface - an difficult enough task - they must also access often incompatible databases scattered across the corporation's organizational divisions. Beyond these technological challenges, organizational researchers also note that often the very culture of a corporation must be changed in order to make a portal even possible.

Despite these failures, the dream of structured data remains a siren song to Corporate Information Officers. [44] If each employee's knowledge can in fact be reduced to a structured data set, the loss of a skilled employee would be less painful. Moreover, having a "knowledge database" has allowed companies to outsource an increasing number of previously internal functions; capitalism's age-old search for cheap labor has thus been digitized. And wherever the laborers are located, portals are part of larger systems of managing them. Despite their emphasis on "personalization," the design specifications and distribution of portals remains a management imperative, not that of the workers.

The architecture of the Web 2.0 portal

At first glance, the portal is a poor model for understanding Web 2.0. Aren't Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other social media sites in competition for the attention of users? However, the portal dream is not just an intranet dream, it is an Internet dream, a Web dream. Even though Web 2.0 has been heralded as a participatory, user-led phenomenon - something that is decidedly not a mass medium, but a "many-to-many" medium where small blogs compete with Clear Channel and *The New York Times* - oddly enough, a Web 2.0 portal is taking shape. As Langlois *et al* note, Web 2.0 sites are "primarily concerned with establishing the technocultural conditions within which users can produce content and within which content and users can be re-channelled through techno-commercial networks and channels." [45] I argue that these techno-commercial networks are best understood with the portal model. Here, I will focus on how Web 2.0 sites link together within the architecture of the portal.

Although there is much discussion of competition, at least at this point the interaction between these Web 2.0 sites is more akin to a standards consortium. Whereas traditional consortia worked on standards for interoperation of devices (MP3), the Web 2.0 consortium centers on the fact that data is a non-rival economic good. Facebook's ownership of my personal data is not threatened if Google owns a copy. Instead, the goal of Web 2.0 sites is to convince users to continuously produce new cybernetic commodities, and Web 2.0 sites have found that more interaction between them, not less, is the way to do this. If this requires Facebook, Google, the New York Times, and Twitter to link to one another via a series of APIs and thus share data, so be it.

As such, Facebook, Google, et al can be conceived of as portlets within a broader portal. Each has a specific function. They link to one another via a bewildering array of protocols, APIs, and user activities. Although the interconnections can be overwhelming, I will use the corporate portal feature set as a guide through them.

A desktop replacement - With mobile computing and synchronization across the cloud, specific devices such as the home desktop, the office laptop, and the commute smartphone are less relevant. Web 2.0 applications add another layer of abstraction, one that resides on the Web, on top of machines. [46] In this way, users can move seamlessly between devices. The material facts of the underlying machines and their specific hardware and software configurations are hidden behind a layer of online tools: email and chat programs, video and image editing programs, office tools, and social networking sites. The material facts of a smartphone become almost invisible; [47] instead, the smartphone acts as a conduit between the user's activities and the network.

This aspect of the Web 2.0 portal is reflected in the production of what Johnathan Zittrain would call "tethered devices" such as computers using the Google Chrome Operating System or Apple's iPad. [48] The "apps" on these devices replace the traditional functionality of graphical operating systems. However, they "live" on the Web and not on the user's machine.

Single sign-on - This is possibly the most contested feature of the Web 2.0 portal, and of course it is the most important, because identification of individual users is key to the surveillance economics of online advertising. Which corporation will build the de facto online ID card? Facebook's Connect program is dominant here; through the Connect API, millions of sites allow users to sign in with their Facebook accounts. Sites such as CNN, Joost, and the New York Times use Facebook Connect as their user's de facto online identity card. Facebook Connect's role in vetting online identity is so effective that pundits argue that it is superceding open source identity efforts such as OpenID as well as potential government-backed ID systems such as that proposed in the *National Strategy for Trusted Identities in Cyberspace*. [49] Thus, Facebook's massive database of real-world identities is connecting well to marketers who desire increasingly granular data on potential customers; Facebook Connect allows third parties access to a user's name, profile picture, gender, networks, user ID, and list of friends. Even as Facebook users click away from Facebook.com, they can remain logged in to the SNS and thus their uses of other Web sites can be tracked with the resulted data stored for later analysis.

Moreover, Facebook is even linked to companies that ostensibly compete with it. Google's YouTube allows users to share videos on Facebook with a single click. One of Facebook's biggest competitors, MySpace, essentially ceded the social networking market by opening up its user base to Facebook via Facebook Connect; the two sites, which were previously divided along class and race lines, [50] seem to be merging, at least at the level of the login. And this works in reverse: a user of Google's Chrome OS or Android phone can download a Facebook app, thus signing into Google (via Chrome/Android) to sign into

Facebook to sign into the thousands of sites that use Facebook Connect. Again, because digital data is nonrival, there is no reason for Google or Facebook to exclude traffic from one another. They share data and compete instead for advertising revenue.

Personalization - Certainly, this differs from corporate portals in that the choice of which "apps" to use is driven by network effects rather than a centralized software inventory system decided by a CIO. The apps I choose to use will be driven more by what my contacts are using, rather than functionality or budget. The sheer breadth of applications on Android/Chrome OS, the iPad/iPhone, and within Facebook appear to provide the same sort of variety and decentralization as the broader Web. However, just as in a corporate Intranet portal, centralization occurs at the single sign-on stage. With more and more apps stored in the cloud and reliant on Facebook for credential checking, no matter how personalized my collection of apps is, I am still linked to central servers.

Content management - This is provided by media sharing and storage sites such as YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, and Photobucket as well as office services Google Docs and Microsoft Office 365. YouTube, for example, not only allows users to share videos, it allows for their storage on Google/YouTube's servers. Facebook is one of the largest holders of images in the world. [51] While consumer-grade 1 terabyte hard drives are available, increasing users store their digital data in the cloud. [52] Again, this layer of abstraction allows users to forget about specific machines (smartphones, laptops, desktops) and focus instead on the data; the physical location of that data is less relevant.

Collaboration tools - Related to content management, centralized storage of photos or documents allows for multiple authors to collaborate. Flickr's photo tagging is a key example; hover over most images in Flickr to see collaborative tags of elements within the image. Google Docs allows for multiple authors to write a text in real-time. Much has been written about new forms of authorship in blogging, where the boundary between author and commenter is blurring. And of course, the exemplars of this process are wikis (Wikipedia is one example, but Wikia's entirely user-produced but for-profit site is growing rapidly).

While nothing is settled, the Web 2.0 Portal appears to be taking shape. Facebook is emerging as the source for single-sign on (although Twitter/OAuth is competitive here). Google remains dominant in search and in office collaboration tools. Multiple media sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo, and Flickr) provide content management. All of these sites allow users to customize them. They can be linked together via APIs. Additionally, the slow process of conglomeration, mergers, and buyouts enables the larger firms to swallow up the smaller, integrating functionality into centralized sites (consider Google's purchase of Writely and YouTube, for example).

Structuring emotion and creativity in Web 2.0

What is being structured in Web 2.0? One might argue that the massive amounts of data on the Web is being structured. This would be an obvious progeny of Yahoo's portal model which was built on a directory of Web sites in the 1990s. Whereas Yahoo hired people to surf the Web and categorize sites, Web 2.0 classification (so-called "tagsonomies" and "folksonomies") will arise from the free labor of users. Indeed, if a "Semantic Web" ever arises, it will be in part due to the ad hoc ontological structuring conducted by everyday Web users. [53]

However, more fundamental - and more troubling - we ultimately see that the data to be structured is the *internal subjective lives and creative activities of users themselves*.

Like the unstructured, creative work processes of knowledge workers – the very processes that corporate portals promise to “structure” – what is alternatively called “consumption work,” “prosumption,” or “produsage” of Web users has traditionally been unstructured. However, as more users are drawn into the Web 2.0 portal, their produsage work falls under the gaze of site owners. Kristin Arvola rightly notes the shift from open-ended Web authoring to “template-driven” Web design: “today being a Web writer does not mean creating a homepage, and it certainly doesn’t mean understanding how servers, the Internet, (X)HTML, and CSS work. Trace the decline of once-popular web hosting services such as Angelfire and Geocities alongside the rise of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace and it becomes clear—for our students, the homepage has gone the way of the landline.” [54] As increasing numbers of users eschew creating their own heterogeneous homepages for signing into the more homogenized Facebook or Google+, they become enclosed in a new form of digital primitive accumulation. Moreover, their “produsage” activities fall under the gaze of Web 2.0 site owners and can be disciplined with terms of service agreements, interface design, and location-aware tracking. [55]

For marketers, this structuring is highly beneficial. Why, for example, do some marketing campaigns “go viral” where others don’t? Can marketers construct an environment for their marketing-viruses to propagate? How can they make users spread such viruses – and make that work fulfilling, participatory, and interactive? Recent marketing research suggests viral marketing campaigns can be effectively produced if marketers measure the “network value” (a concept similar to network effects) of individual customers to discover who is most influential in the social graph and then target these influential nodes with short, clever advertisements they can easily share. [56] To do this, one fundamental process has to occur: the users must be graphed: Sue has a relationship to Juan has a relationship to Dmitri. At the simplest level, human interaction is reduced to edges on a network graph; in essence, any connection between one person and another is enough to signify the existence of complex human relationships. Of course, someone with more edges must be far more influential. Thanks to the Web 2.0 portal, this graph has been constructed.

But this involves far more than simply mapping out social networks (as in social network analysis) or even producing predictive models of chaotic phenomena such as viral marketing. [57] The Web 2.0 Portal is engineered to actively shape its possibilities of use. Networks must be engineered in order for dataveillant, viral marketing to work. For a virus to propagate, a homogeneous environment must be produced. To produce such a network, social interaction is simplified to binary choices like “friend,” “like,” “trust.” Other emotional scenarios (ambivalence, boredom, ennui, mania) are harder to graph, and thus might be like antibodies to marketing-viruses. Hence the Web 2.0 aesthetic of clean, user-friendly, abstract graphical interfaces.

In addition, the turn to affect in cultural studies provides a language to parse the structuring of emotional labor in social media. One is struck by Arlie Hochschild’s landmark study of the management of emotional labor in service workers. As she describes, when elements of the private emotional system

are taken into the marketplace and sold as human labor, they become stretched into standardized social forms. In these forms, a person’s contribution of feeling is thinner, less freighted with consequence; but at the same time it is seen as coming less from the self and being less directed to the other. For that reason it is more susceptible to estrangement. [58]

So, too, is emotional work standardized in the Web 2.0 portal, just as previously unstructured creative work is structured by the corporate portal. If we are doing the “work of being watched,” [59] then the Web 2.0 portal is our distributed-centralized worksite. There, we produce ourselves within the structure of the portal. As Langlois *et al* note, “Commercial Web 2.0 platforms are attractive because they allow us, as users, to explore and build knowledge and

social relations in an intimate, personalized way. In this dynamic, the commercialization of users and information is one of the central factors through which this enrichment takes place." [60] Thus intimate knowledge-building and socialization are mediated by commodification of those processes. Bifo argues that our daily lives and even our very bodies fail to provide us pleasure, and so in consequence we turn to cognitive work and competition for "narcissistic reaffirmation;" [61] if this is true, the pleasures of the Web 2.0 workplace (gaining followers, competing for the best comment, anxious browsing from tab to tab, intimate personalization) are effects of emotional standardization. Competition – a decidedly neoliberal value [62] – becomes part of the affective work of constituting networks and making emotional exchanges.

And of course, since Web 2.0 is built on the "perpetual beta" model, [63] Web 2.0 site portlets can be easily redesigned as our intimate, knowledge-building activities shift and change over time. [64] If our uses of the network become nonstandard, they can be appropriated quickly. The cost of this is emotional distortion. As Hochschild argues, emotional questions arise out of our (post)modern condition of uncertainty and fragmentation: What should I be feeling? and Who am I? These prompt us to look to our emotions for some grounding, some way to locate ourselves. But with feelings largely managed within emotional capitalism, "the commercial distortion of the managed heart becomes all the more important as a human cost." [65] Similarly, Eva Illouz has noted that emotion and economic logics have increasingly interpenetrated one another. [66] The personal in the political economic becomes personalized standardization.

Finally, just as corporate portals have in part allowed for the outsourcing of affective, flexible, creative activities such as customer service and computer programming, the Web 2.0 portal outsources affective work to new spheres of daily life. Web 2.0 is in part a response to the blurring identity-political and spatio-temporal boundaries between worker, consumer, producer, family member, lover, activist, and citizen. As leisure becomes work and work becomes "gamified," and as private and public spaces blur together, the Web 2.0 portal becomes the site through which all activities flow. As emotional work is alienated from users in Web 2.0, emotion appears as an avatar, a like, a click, a digital gift, or a Tweet. [67] Alienated, digitized emotion becomes an abstraction, rendering the physical location, social setting, or embodiment of the subject immaterial. If customer service can be done anywhere by anyone with the appropriate on-screen scripts to follow, so too can the affective work of subjects relating to one another.

* * *

I find it hard not to return to the bleak critiques of the culture industry offered decades ago by the Frankfurt School. In describing mass culture and marketing, Adorno and Horkheimer note that "it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger." [68] Mark Andrejevic updates the tautology of marketing by noting that

The refrain of the marketing industry (at least for public consumption) is that advertising does not instil desires, emotions, anxieties, but merely taps into already existing, perhaps latent, ones. If someone is moved by a targeted campaign to make a purchase that wouldn't have been made in the absence of the ad, the marketers have merely helped a consumer to realize his or her desire. This is the apparent indeterminacy of consumer desire: on the one hand reliant upon the ministrations of marketers, and on the other, an un-coerced invocation of latent subjective autonomy. Even as advertisers work to gather more information about consumers in order to manage their responses, they refer to their own increasingly slavish devotion to the whims of their targets. [69]

Thus, as the Web 2.0 portal increasingly becomes standardized and distributed, the dialectical relationship between user desire and marketing desire closes in on itself. Management of the

affective work of a Web 2.0 user is aimed squarely at the realization of surplus value locked in commodities; the affective play of a Web 2.0 user is aimed squarely at the production of the self *qua* declaring affinity with people and commodities in equal amounts. Web 2.0 sites link together to trace these playwork flows and to steer them towards the needs of marketers while satisfying users' desires. It is a difficult balance.

I conclude by taking serious the "portal metaphor." Who is looking through this portal? In the corporate model, the worker looks through the portal into the world of the the corporate intranet; thus the worker's vision is literally circumscribed by the corporate IT architecture. But in the Web 2.0 portal, it is increasingly apparent that the flow of the gaze is coming *from the Web towards the user*. The user is circumscribed within the Web 2.0 portal. To draw on Paul Smith, [70] the user is "cerned" by the mastering theory of Web 2.0, accepting a cultural patrimony as the ultimate networked sovereign consumer, and being encircled within the constraints of new media capitalism - the new culture industry. With Web 2.0 sites articulated together, the new culture industry has a unique vision into the subjective lives of users.

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Mashup by Erin R. Anderson



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